

the museum of  
**crime**

**EN**

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# 1. **the origins of the judicial police**

The creation of the Judicial Police wasn't a spur-of-the-moment initiative. Even in the 1870s magistrates and lawyers were discussing the need for a specialist police department. Up until 1919, judicial investigations were carried out by the local Chief of Police. But he had so many other demands on his time that he couldn't always give his judicial duties the attention they required. Moreover, his scope was limited: he was only authorized to work within his own municipality. The State Police (Rijkswacht/Gendarmerie) also carried out judicial investigations, but they were undermanned and, in any case, they could only work outside their area if they caught someone red-handed. Both forces lacked specialist training.

Numerous crimes went unsolved and their perpetrators unpunished. During and shortly after the First World War, Belgium was plagued by organized criminal gangs and the judicial authorities were found wanting. So in 1919 a new police department was founded: the Judicial Police.

# **a specialist corps**

The Judicial Police consisted of several squads, but was authorized to operate country-wide. The department came under the aegis of the Ministry of Justice. So the full name was: Gerechtelijke Politie bij de Parketten / Police judiciaire près les parquets, which translates as the 'Judicial Police assigned to the Public Prosecutors'. Police officers were under the supervision and authority of the Procurator-General. The new department was set up to investigate serious crimes. The investigators were responsible for collecting evidence so that the Public Prosecutor could track down the perpetrators. To this end, detectives used all kinds of investigative methods and techniques. They were trained at the School of Criminology in Brussels.

**1.1** After the First World War, the region around Ghent was terrorized by what became known as the Van Hoe-Verstuyft Gang. The gang carried out a total of 36 attacks, including 14 murders.

In 1920 the newly-founded Judicial Police managed to catch the gang leader Edmond Verstuyft. A few days later they also apprehended his brother. Eventually the whole gang was brought to justice. The case generated huge public interest and people flocked to Ghent for the trial.

Ten gang members were sentenced to death, which was automatically converted into life-long imprisonment. Sixteen others were sentenced to hard labour.

**1.2** After the First World War, a bunch of thieves also operated in the area around the village of Adegem. Between December 1918 and December 1920, the gang carried out 17 attacks, resulting in five deaths.

During the course of 1919 and 1920, the Judicial Police detained most members of the gang. It was December 1920 before the police managed to track down the ringleaders Oscar Merci and Alfons Naudts. They were holed up in a house in Adegem and refused to give themselves up. After a 10-hour siege, the police decided to overpower them by setting fire to the house. Oscar Merci died.

The gang had 24 members. Two gang members were given a death sentence, which was converted into life-long hard labour. Five members were sentenced to hard labour and 12 were

given a prison sentence. Two members died before being sentenced and three were acquitted.

**1.3** In 1921 the School of Criminology was founded to train the Judicial Police. Located in the courthouse in Brussels, the school took a science-driven approach to training inspectors, police officers and magistrates. Theory and practice went hand in hand.

The training programme included criminal law and criminal proceedings, forensic medicine, toxicology, criminal anthropology and psychology. The subject of 'scientific policing' taught the 'spoken portrait' method of describing individuals so as to better ascertain their identity. Laboratory techniques like judicial photography and microscopy were also taught.

**1.4** Judicial Police investigators wore plain clothes rather than a uniform. They could identify themselves with a badge and warrant card. Their basic equipment consisted of a pistol, truncheon and handcuffs. They also had an armband to make their identity known when they drew their weapon. Their equipment has evolved with time.

**1.5** During mobilization just before the Second World War, members of the Judicial Police had to wear a tricolour armband (i.e. black, yellow and red as per the Belgian flag) to show that they were legally authorized to carry a weapon. They continued to use that armband under German occupation, but that did not please the Germans who replaced it with a white armband.

**1.6** Though the Judicial Police consisted of several police squads, it was authorized to operate all over the country. The Ghent squad had always covered the whole Province of East Flanders. In 1967 the province acquired an additional squad, which covered the districts of Dendermonde and Oude-naarde and was based in Aalst.

**1.7** Ghent's Judicial Police moved around. First it was based in Keizer Karelstraat, from 1931 in the courthouse and from 1960 in Pacificatielaan.

**1.8** Several squads put together their own collection, some their own museum, the idea being to familiarize trainee policemen with investigative methods and techniques and well-known cases from the past.

## 2. **the museum of crime**

The museum of Ghent's Judicial Police provided trainee policemen with countless practical examples of the different methods of investigating crimes. Detectives were trained to look for, examine and evaluate clues and physical evidence in a bid to solve those crimes.

The museum provided insight into the mode of operation of both the police and criminals. Policemen learned to recognize a variety of weapons and different causes of death, to distinguish real from fake and to identify individuals. They were given examples of manipulated games of chance, they were taught what is lawful and unlawful and what is contrary to public decency.

# **a fascinating collection**

The museum contained evidence and seized effects. The crimes were contextualized by means of photographs of crime scenes, autopsies and reconstructions, case files and newspaper articles. The museum also guided visitors through landmarks in the history of the Judicial Police.

Informative labels accompanied the exhibits. The guide, himself an investigator, elaborated on investigations, some of which he was personally involved in.



**2.1** The museum contained evidence and seized effects. Initially these were preserved in the clerk of the court's office. If the curator of the museum deemed the evidence didactically interesting, he sought the Public Prosecutor's permission to exhibit it.

Most of the cases in the museum were investigated by Ghent's Judicial Police. However, evidence from other squads than the Judicial Police, like the Municipal or State Police, sometimes found its way into the collection.

**2.2** In the 1950s the museum was refurbished and the contents added to under the direction of Chief Superintendent Henri Herrmann. He divided the space into different categories: identification of individuals and objects;

thefts; crimes and offences against public trust; narcotics; unlawful practice of medicine; ethics; weapons; forensic medicine and games of chance.

**2.3** Belgium's police services were reformed by law in 1998. In 2001 they underwent a fundamental structural reform, whereby the Municipal Police, the State Police (Rijkswacht/Gendarmerie) and the Judicial Police merged to create an integrated police service. The relocation which followed resulted in the closure of the museum. The collection was transferred to a new location, but it was not put on display.

### **3. the crime solved**

Evidence, newspaper cuttings and visual material relating to real cases. That was the collection housed in the museum of Ghent's Judicial Police. STAM set to work on that collection and brought the research back to life. How did investigators solve these crimes? How did they track down the perpetrators? What provided the breakthrough? This exhibition reveals the methods and techniques investigators used to hunt down and expose perpetrators.

## 4. **what happened here?**

The investigation to establish the exact course of events begins when the police arrive at the scene of a suspected crime. The detectives look for answers to five key questions: what, where, when, who and why? The place where the criminal offence occurred is called the 'crime scene'. But we apply the same term to any other location where possible traces of the crime are found, like the perpetrator's or victim's house or car.

The police always have to go about their work very carefully to avoid destroying possible clues. The preliminary findings are established during a legal investigation. At the next stage, the police return to carry out a search of the premises or for a reconstruction of the events. So the crime scene is crucial to the investigation. It usually enables the investigators to establish the true course of events.

**4.1** The basic principle of **trace evidence analysis** is that 'every contact leaves a trace'. It is almost impossible to commit a crime without leaving trace materials at the crime scene. Where the perpetrator walks, what he breaks, leaves behind or even just touches... it can all be used against him as silent evidence. It is the task of the detectives to gather facts and collect all those trace materials without them being lost or destroyed. So preservation is vital. After that, some of these silent traces are transferred to the laboratory where forensic scientists allow them to speak.

**4.2** On the morning of December 9<sup>th</sup> 1961, the police received an urgent call. In Oostwinkel a man had been found dead on the doorstep of the police constable's house. Detectives from the Judicial Police immediately went to the **crime scene** to establish the preliminary findings. It seems the man had summoned the last of his strength to make it to the police constable's house. The police searched the victim's house. Though they found no evidence of a break-in, they did find traces of blood. They also detected bloody footprints and dragging marks. Consequently, suspicion fell on the dead man's wife. She was arrested the same day and confessed immediately.

#### **4.3 a tragic misunderstanding?**

There had long been tensions in the household. There were also rumours of domestic violence, drinking and mutual death threats. The wife claimed that her husband withheld a part of his wage.

On returning home from the café early one morning, the man had an argument with his wife. When he went out later on, his wife feared he was going to fetch a knife, so she armed herself with a breadknife. When her husband came back in, there was a scuffle.

The wife stabbed him with the breadknife several times. As it turned out, her husband was not armed...

#### **4.4 the hand of the perpetrator**

In 1931 a grocer was found dead in the kitchen of her shop in Kortrijksestraat in Ghent. Witnesses claimed to have seen a man in the kitchen, but other than that the police had few leads. An extensive search of the area produced nothing further.

However, finger marks found at the crime scene led to a breakthrough. After comparing them to fingerprints of known offenders, the police were able to identify and arrest the assailant. He eventually stood trial for several murders.

#### **4.5 the all-important box of tricks**

Since the earliest days of the Judicial Police, detectives have been aware of the importance of the preliminary findings at the crime scene. When the police

receive a call, the team on duty goes and investigates. The investigators take a small case of investigative equipment with them to establish the preliminary findings. The police commissioner of the department decides what it should contain. The investigators set to work on the preliminary findings in their own way. What each preliminary finding has in common is that the investigators document the situation as they found it. They make sketches, take photographs and measurements and remove items for examination in the laboratory. They set out their preliminary findings in a detailed incident report.

**4.5.1** Fingers leave greasy marks at the crime scene. The outer layer of skin contains pores, which secrete sweat and oils. Moreover, the lines on a person's fingertips are unique to that person, which is why the police can use fingerprinting for identification purposes.

**4.5.2** Investigators make finger marks visible by applying chemical powder with a brush. They then compare those finger marks to the suspect's fingerprints.

**4.5.3** Case for objects bearing finger marks. It ensured marks were not lost during transportation.

**4.5.4** Equipment used by a crime scene investigation team.

**4.6** In 1984 a young woman was found dead at home, murdered with 60 stabs delivered by a garden fork. Suspicion fell on the husband who made the discovery. He adamantly denied all involvement in the murder, but the police seemed sure of their case. The man spent a while in the cell, but his alibi appeared to be watertight. A new suspect came onto the police radar, but no confessions followed. By this time it was impossible to come up with hard-and-fast proof because the crime scene was no longer protected and any clues would have been destroyed. Research showed that a new methodology was required for a **crime scene investigation**. Belgium's first specialized crime scene investigation team was created in Ghent at the end of 1989.

A team consisted of two policemen and one laboratory technician.

#### **4.7 the white suit brigade**

In the case of killings and suspicious deaths, since 1989 a specialized team has been sent to the crime scene. The priority for these specialized crime scene investigation teams is to proceed in a 'trace-aware' manner. The crime scene as found by the police is 'frozen'. Only the crime scene investigation team is allowed entry. The members of that team wear protective bodysuits, surgical masks and gloves to avoid cross-contamination. The team is given at least two hours before the public prosecutor arrives. The crime scene investigation team must follow rigorous procedures from the outset. A gangway is constructed

at the crime scene and all those who come and go have to use it. Detectives take photographs or make videos and a field sketch. They mark trace evidence or they take it with them for examination in the laboratory. The team is still involved even after the legal investigation. Sometimes its members are present at the interrogation of suspects or at the reconstruction.

**4.7.1** This diorama shows a crime scene investigation team at work at the scene of the crime. They are investigating the place where a burned-out car and a body were found. It relates to the murder of a taxi driver in the De Pinte area in 1993. The diorama was made by the detective investigating the case.

## **4.8 betrayed by holes**

Perpetrators often use the same method time and time again, and this can land them in trouble. In the 1970s a professional burglar targeted rectories. With every break-in he would drill a little hole in the window frame of the rectory, which enabled him to open the window. However the thief was arrested and stood trial. He spent several years in prison.

After his release, the number of thefts in rectories started to rise again and at each of the break-ins the police found little holes in the window frame. The detectives recognized the burglar's modus operandi and it was not long before he was arrested again.



**4.8.1** This professional thief usually sold his booty. But when he stole a statue of the Virgin Mary, the deeply religious man was consumed by remorse so he buried the statue in the Zoniënwood/ Forêt de Soignes. But first he wrapped it carefully in paper dipped in candle grease.

**4.8.2** In the case of old locks, burglars usually use their collection of keys to break in so as to avoid leaving traces.

**4.8.3** These pieces of door from churches in Wetteren, Wondelgem and Aalst show traces of a break-in.

## **4.9 careless clean-up undoing of valentine murderer**

Traces of blood are very important in the investigation process. The blood itself can provide information about the identity of perpetrator or victim. The shape of the bloodstain and the location of the blood spatters tell researchers a great deal about how a crime was committed. In the 1990s a man reported his wife missing. The police came to the man's house. They found the house immaculate, apart from several spots on the carpet, which proved to be traces of blood. After lengthy interrogation, the man confessed to having murdered his wife on Valentine's Day, before sawing her body into eight pieces on a table and dumping them in the canal.

**4.10** In 1982 the police searched a suspect's holiday home, following a bank robbery in Ghent. In the house they found the requisites for the raid neatly laid out on a table. Sometimes, it seems, crimes are easy to solve...

In exceptional circumstances, such as a fire, flood or cry for help or catching someone red-handed, the police have the right to enter a house immediately. In all the other cases, the police have to respect people's privacy and a **house search** is only permitted if a magistrate issues a search warrant, i.e. a court order authorizing the police to look for evidence at the scene of the crime.

#### **4.11 the proof is on the table**

Finding himself in dire financial straits, in 1982 an estate agent decided to raid a bank on the Kouter in Ghent. He entered the bank in disguise and pretended he wanted to purchase a large quantity of gold. Once inside the bank manager's office, he pointed his gun at him and demanded a sum of money. He then forced the manager to drink cognac spiked with a sedative. Meanwhile, the bank employees smelt a rat and activated the silent alarm. The police arrived immediately and arrested the raider even before he was able to leave the bank manager's office.

**4.11.1** The detectives found the requisites for a hold-up lying on the table in the perpetrator's house in the country.

## 4.12 a suspicious smell

You have to deploy all your senses when searching premises. In 1969 a decapitated body was found in a field. The victim's wife was the prime suspect, but she denied any involvement – and there was no trace of the head.

After three weeks, detectives paid a visit to the wife's parents' house. Their noses put them on the right track. A terrible stench in the attic led them to the head, which was lying in a corner behind a flowerpot, wrapped in a plastic bag.

**4.12.1** The head was taken to Ghent, where an autopsy revealed that the man was killed by a bullet from a Long Rifle. The gun was found in the victim's home.

**4.13** As an investigation moves forward, detectives form a picture of exactly what happened. But in many cases that is insufficient. Statements from suspects, witnesses or victims can be contradictory. And does their story tally with the reality at the crime scene?

So a magistrate can ask the police to carry out a **reconstruction** of events as faithfully as possible so that detectives can clarify any contradictions or gaps and allay or confirm suspicions.

A reconstruction plays an important role in the investigation. At the same time, it is often an emotional occasion as it requires perpetrator, victim and/or next of kin to relive the events.

#### **4.14 an uncomfortable reunion**

On November 12<sup>th</sup> 1965 a very uneasy family reunion took place in Ledeberg.

On the face of it, everything seemed normal enough: a young man sitting at the kitchen table with his mother-in-law, a pot of tea in front of them.

Then the woman showed the police how she had mixed rat poison in her son-in-law's tea. On that occasion, the young man didn't drink the entire contents of the cup. Several months later, she used the same method to try and poison the young man because she didn't approve of her daughter's marriage. He survived the attempted murder and so was able to take part in the reconstruction.

**4.14.1** For a long time, thallium was a typical murderer's poison. It is colourless, odourless and tasteless. The poison is also slow-working, which makes it difficult to determine the exact time of the poisoning. Until the end of the twentieth century, it was freely available as rat poison.

**4.14.2** The victim before and after poisoning. Symptoms of thallium poisoning include hair loss, extreme weight loss and neuralgia.

#### **4.15 is the witness telling the truth?**

Reconstructions serve not only to recreate the perpetrator's actions accurately to establish or eliminate events which may or may not have occurred at the crime scene. The statements of other parties or witnesses can also lead to a reconstruction, in which case actions before, during and after the events are taken into account.

In 1927 a cobbler was found dead in Luxemburgstraat in Ghent. A reconstruction was carried out to check witness statements. A policeman took the place of the witness to ascertain whether or not passers-by could see a blackboard and a particular person through the window.

**4.15.1** The cobbler's iron last was seized by the police to establish whether or not it was the murder weapon. The examination revealed that it was not.

#### **4.16 the refuse tip murder**

A woman who lived close to a refuse tip often went there to look for reusable items. One day in 1966 she found a substantial sum of money. She showed it to her neighbour, who was also at the rubbish

dump. He dealt her a blow with a hammer and grabbed the money. The badly injured woman fled homewards. The man ran after her and attacked her a second time. Again the woman fled and eventually dropped down dead in a neighbour's garden. This so-called 'refuse tip murder' is an unusual case because the crime scene covered such a wide area. A field sketch was made and a reconstruction carried out to try and bring clarity to the events which had occurred across this large area.

- A. Refuse tip
- B. Perpetrator's house
- C. Traces of blood
- D. Hammer
- E. Rake
- F. Victim's basket

#### **4.17 filmed reconstruction**

In 1979 two gangsters broke into a car dealer's house in Sint-Amandsberg. They murdered the whole family. Five people died, including the 13-year-old daughter. They made off with just 4,000 francs (worth less than 400 euros today). The crime shocked the country to the core. The perpetrators' capture a few days later was front-page news. The police treated the case with the highest priority. The investigators linked it to the murder of a shopkeeper in the port of Ghent earlier that year. They decided to film the reconstruction, the first time this had been done in Belgium. Public interest in the reconstruction was overwhelming. The press was there in full force, accompanied by a crowd of onlookers. One

enterprising trader even set up a hotdog stall at the crime scene.

#### **4.18 150,000 bottles of wine**

In 1978 the Judicial Police entered the premises of a wine merchant in De Pinte. Detectives came out with 150,000 bottles of wine and labels.

When goods are seized, the police make potential evidence available to the court. The police have the right to remove any goods which might help establish the truth. After the investigation, the police can return incriminating items. In this particular case, however, the owner didn't see his bottles of wine again. They were confiscated by the court. The investigation revealed that the wine merchant was passing off cheap wine labelled as expensive wine.

**4.18.1** The wine merchant's method was very simple. He bought up cheap wine, diluted it, bottled it and affixed labels from an expensive wine. He soaked off the labels of cheap sparkling wines and replaced them with Champagne labels.

#### **4.19 poisoning for dummies**

In the 1990s the American public was rocked by a most unusual case. Several women in New York fell ill after eating candy. It had been sent to them anonymously, presumably in an attempt to poison them, for it was glazed with rat poison. Suspicion fell on a Belgian who had harassed the girls while studying in the United States. When searching the suspect's home in Ghent, detectives found lots of books on the subject of poisoning and murder.

The possession of such books is not punishable and not sufficient proof to convict a person of attempted poisoning. The find was however helpful and prompted a more thorough investigation.

**4.20** When a reconstruction is staged, every relevant action is re-enacted and carefully recorded.

## 5. **who knows something?**

Did anyone see anything? Who is this victim? Does anyone know this woman? And where is the perpetrator? The police had to gather information in different ways to find answers to these numerous questions. Detectives usually combine several techniques. They interrogate suspects, but they also question witnesses about what and who they saw. The information provided by these witnesses can be used to create an identikit to help identify the perpetrator or victim. An appeal for information is then issued in the search for known and unknown offenders.



**5.1** On December 26<sup>th</sup> a man and a woman were found dead on the Scheldedijk in Wetteren, a place favoured by court-ing couples in the 1930s. The assailant probably battered the skulls of the vic-tims with a hammer. Having found no useable evidence, the police proceeded to **interrogate** at length members of the family of the two victims, and after-wards anyone who might have seen something. Interrogation of the father and brother-in-law of the murdered woman identified them as suspects, but both denied involvement. In sub-sequent questioning the police tried to check their alibis, find eyewitnesses and witnesses and catch suspects out on contradic-tions or inconsistencies. Every tip-off was followed up, including ‘café talk’.

## **5.2 the witness is lying**

Why weren’t things as they should have been between the murdered girl and her father? Where was everyone on the evening of the double murder? The witnesses gave conflicting information. Were they lying? One witness popped up with an impossible, concocted story. Getting at the truth is the focus of an interrogation. A detective uses all kinds of interrogation techniques designed to make the witness or suspect realize that lying or denial is point-less. For example, he will present overwhelming evidence, feign sympathy or adopt a confrontational approach – good cop, bad cop – or prick the interro-gatee’s conscience.

**5.2.1** From notes taken by the investigator: “The girl was lying on her stomach, face downwards. To the left of her was a pool of blood where the man had lain. He had rolled further down the slope.”

**5.2.2** The police also received anonymous tip-offs.

**5.2.3** Victims’ love letters.

**5.2.4** The events caused such consternation that a folk-singer wrote a song about it.

**5.2.5** Confrontation between chip stall owner and suspect. Did the victim’s father buy chips that evening? Or was he in bed? It was one person’s word against another’s.

**5.2.6** The victim’s sister claimed that she and the suspects (her husband and her father) never visited the ‘Pier den duivel’ café . And they never went there for a beer. The detective confronted her with the statements of other

witnesses. She changed her story from: “My husband doesn’t visit this café. I never go there” to “It’s true, I know that.”

**5.2.7** The detectives marked the information from the witness statements on a map of the city in an attempt to trace the route taken by the perpetrator.

## **5.3 the perpetrator confesses**

Not every perpetrator denies his or her crime. Many perpetrators confess quite spontaneously or during interrogation. On November 9<sup>th</sup> 1953, the police were notified of a possible double suicide. In a house in Jan Breydelstraat in Ghent, they found bloodstains and the bodies of a married couple. However, the position of the bodies and other evidence suggested that they had been murdered. For example, there were

signs of blood having been mopped up.

The victims' 19-year-old son had disappeared without trace. According to his 8-year-old sister, the previous day her brother had hit their mother. The police circulated a description of the suspect. The next day a customs officer arrested him at the border-crossing with France. He confessed immediately.

**5.3.1** Letter in which the perpetrator apologizes to his sister for murdering their parents.

## **5.4 why did he do it?**

The young man hit his father with an iron bar and stabbed him with a dagger. He cut his mother's throat. But the motif for the murder was still unclear even after he had confessed. Could a simple row have triggered

parricide? The police wanted to know more about the minor's state of mind. So a moral investigation was carried out: the police questioned friends and teaching staff about the suspect's education, relationships and social environment. It appeared that the perpetrator had been expelled from school and accused of theft several times. He had attempted suicide and often behaved 'melodramatically'. Since the investigation indicated a psychological disorder, a full medical examination followed.

**5.4.1** A sociological investigation into the suspect's past enabled the judge to take into account his background, personality and intentions.

**5.4.2** The psychiatric tests were inconclusive.

The court psychiatrist came to the conclusion that the suspect was a psychopath, but accountable for his actions. He knew what he was doing. The defence experts contradicted this, believing him to be of unsound mind.

**5.5** Can witnesses describe the suspected offender? If so, their descriptions are used to construct an **identikit**. That sketch is then circulated in a bid to find the suspect. When a number of elderly ladies became the victims of a series of attacks in 1973, their descriptions of the assailant soon led the police to conclude that it was the same man. He posed as a priest and won their trust before attacking them. The identikit enabled the investigators to catch the perpetrator.

The man turned out to be more than 'just' an assailant. In the case of a victim in Ghent, his plan went awry. The 70-year-old woman became suspicious and the 'priest' strangled her. Witnesses saw the elderly woman in the presence of her murderer. Their description enabled the investigators to link the murder to the other attacks.

## **5.6 too long in the water**

Identikits are made not only of perpetrators. In 1978 a body was fished out of the Ghent-Terneuzen canal. The face of the deceased was too badly battered to circulate photographs. So forensic sketch artists built an identikit. That reconstructed picture led to the victim being identified as the manager of Café Flandria in Sint-Niklaas. The murderer turned out to be his lodger,

who in a fit of anger had hit the landlord over the head with a hammer.

### **5.7 contradictory descriptions?**

It is not easy to give a detailed description of an individual. Consequently, sometimes different witnesses give different descriptions of the same person. The police have to take this into account, which sometimes leads to unusual 'be on the look-out' (BOLO) alerts.

The police questioned two witnesses who had sat in the car with a suspect for several hours. They described him and emphasized different features. So the police issued two different identikits of the suspect. When the man was eventually identified, he was found to resemble both portraits.

### **5.8 eyes, ears, mouths and chins**

There are several ways to build identikits. Usually a forensic sketch artist just makes a sketch on paper. Sometimes the detectives use preprinted foils of types of facial features (ears, hair, mouths, chins, even wrinkles) from an identikit box to generate a composite sketch.

**5.8.1** To generate a composite sketch, the police use (among other things) an identikit.

**5.8.2** Against the rules, a drawing was made of the suspect by all the witnesses together. Normally witnesses are questioned separately to prevent them influencing each other. However, the drawing was a good likeness and the perpetrator was found.

## 5.9 **heart pierced with arrow and dagger**

Some people have very distinctive physical features, making it easier for detectives to identify them. When a suspect is arrested, the police draw up a description of the individual which includes not only his or her personal details, but also external features.

When the police arrested a 20-year-old car thief in December 1972, his tattoos were included in his personal details: “heart with arrow and dagger running through it”. On February 3<sup>rd</sup> 1975, the man managed to escape while being escorted to the clerk of the court’s office. The police lost track of him.

Two months after his escape, Ghent police caught a man trying to steal a car. They pursued him, but lost him in Muinkpark. A month later,

a body was fished out of the pond in the park. The body was unrecognizable, but the fingerprints and a conspicuous tattoo identified him as the runaway car thief.

**5.10** At the end of January 1938, a dog unearthed the shallowly buried body of a young woman on Antwerp’s left bank. She had been shot in the neck. The body was too badly decomposed to be recognizable. In a bid to identify the young woman, the detectives issued a description of her clothing. The next day two women went to the Judicial Police in Antwerp, believing the clothes to be those of their sister. To enable them to officially **identify** the victim, the detectives put the clothes on a tailor’s dummy. The women confirmed their sister’s identity.

### **5.11 framed by personal belongings**

Confirmation of the victim's identity soon led the detectives to her new boyfriend, a 25-year-old from Ghent. While searching the suspect's house, more personal items were discovered: a handbag, two rings, two pawn tickets for fur coats and a fur collar. The items were found to belong to two other victims in unsolved murder cases: a publican from Ghent and a prostitute from Brussels. The items linked the suspect to those cases. While undergoing interrogation, he confessed to the three murders. The press cashed in on the sensational story. For weeks one article after another revealed details of the three murder cases. Journalists sought to shed light on the murderer's motives. He was compared to Eugène Weid-

mann who had committed similar murders in France and was the last person in that country to go to the guillotine (June 1939). "The Belgian Weidmann" was more fortunate. He, too, was sentenced to death but in Belgium since 1863 a life sentence had automatically been reduced to life imprisonment.

### **5.12 the clock's ticking**

Personal belongings have often led to the identification of a victim. In April 1959 the body of a young woman was found in a polder just over the Dutch border. She had been shot, doused in petrol and burned beyond recognition. For two weeks the detectives didn't know who she was. And nobody had been reported missing. Then a watchmaker noticed that a clock he had repaired had

not been collected. A mother from Ghent recognized the clock as her daughter's. The young woman appeared to have disappeared off the face of the earth. Was she the victim of the polder murder? The little medallions found by the charred body were sufficient proof for the mother that she was.

### **5.13 hidden camera**

A politician reported a theft in his home. Jewellery and cheques had been stolen. Some while later, the thief and his wife used the cheques in a supermarket. They were filmed by the security camera, but the images were very hazy. After some while, the thief took one of the stolen items of jewellery to a jeweller for valuation. The jeweller recognized the piece and notified the police. When the thief came back to

collect the jewel, he was arrested. The detectives went off to search the suspect's house. His wife opened the door wearing a long, black coat. Unmistakably the same coat as filmed by the security camera! So the camera did prove its worth after all.

### **5.14 the century's most infamous art theft**

The theft of the 'Righteous Judges' from St Bavo's Cathedral in Ghent still captures the public imagination today. The panel of the altarpiece by the Van Eyck brothers was stolen during the night of April 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> 1934. Though it has never been found, the identity of the offender is now known. We even know how the crime was committed. The only mystery is where the panel is hidden.



In 1934 the Judicial Police issued a request for information about the panel. Numerous amateur detectives also set to work. Even today, the police still follow up tips relating to the theft.

**5.15** Other (police) departments are often brought in to help track down a perpetrator. Sometimes the police specifically request the cooperation of the general public. Does anyone recognize this stolen object? Did anyone witness this crime?

The examining magistrate may seek the public's cooperation in helping track down suspects, escaped prisoners and missing persons. Usually in these cases a photograph or a photofit is issued, or a description of the person is given. A police report documents details of a person or inci-

dent and it is then filed in an internal, paper or digital databank. That information enables police departments to take the necessary steps should they come across that person or incident, leading for example to him or her being questioned and/or arrested, or an item confiscated.

A police report contains a description of an individual's appearance. On the basis of that description an unknown person can be identified or a known person **sought**.

**5.15.1** In the 1880s the French police investigator Alphonse Bertillon developed the 'portrait parlé' or 'spoken portrait', a method of describing a person's appearance in great detail. At the time, a 'portrait' in words was easier to circulate by telegram or telephone than a photograph.

**5.15.2** For each crime the police put together a 'villains album' to present to witnesses. In the 1960s those albums fell into disuse and the Judicial Police switched over to a card-index system.

## 6. **telltale objects and other giveaways**

When investigating a crime, objects often speak louder than words. The traces which objects and people leave can lead to a breakthrough. However, objects and traces don't easily divulge their secrets. The truth usually only comes to light after the evidence has been examined, compared and tested by an expert. Sometimes the expert's practised eye and experience are enough, but often microscopes and chemical tests play a role as well. There is an expert for every object and every trace. From forensic scientists to chemists, from philatelists, through handwriting and ballistic experts to art historians... Each of them can provide the breakthrough.

**6.1** On the morning of May 27<sup>th</sup> 1959, a young woman was strangled in her house in Berlare. Detectives found finger marks on a broken window, footprints around the house and the impression of a bicycle tyre. The detectives made a **plaster cast** of the bicycle tyre track and compared it to different types of bicycle tyres. This told them that the track was that of a 'Grand Luxe' bicycle tyre made by Bergougnan. Armed with that information, the detectives visited all the bicycle repairers in the area. But to no avail. Not a single bicycle repairer could remember who he had sold one of those tyres to.

## **6.2 break-in breakthrough**

Suspecting that the strangler was from the village, the detectives questioned several men with a criminal record, but nothing could be pinned on any of them. Three months after the murder, the detectives launched a large-scale comparative study of fingerprints. All the men from Berlare aged between 17 and 40 – and there were more than a thousand – were asked to come forward and have their fingerprints taken. However, the perpetrator was not among them. Eventually the strangulation in Berlare was solved purely by chance. The police picked up a 31-year-old man attempting a break-in in Dendermonde. He lived in Zele, seven kilometres from the murder scene, and had a previous conviction for attempted assault.

The police took his fingerprints. They matched the finger marks at the murder scene. When searching his house, detectives found his bicycle. It had Bergougnan tyres. A night-time interrogation resulted in a confession.

**6.2.1** The cast of a footprint was unusable in this investigation.

**6.2.2** With a cast of the tyre track the detective was able to determine the make of tyre on what could be the perpetrator's bicycle.

**6.2.3** The finger marks on the broken glass were compared to the fingerprints of all the men in Berlare. The perpetrator was not among them.

### **6.3 police get their teeth into a murder**

In February 1944 the body of a woman was found in Ghent. She had been murdered. The detectives found a half-eaten apple near her body. They made a cast of the bite marks in the apple. Later two suspects were asked to provide their tooth marks. The detectives compared the suspects' bite pattern with the marks in the apple. The bite marks of one of them corresponded.

**6.3.1** The detectives compared the suspects' bite pattern with the marks in the apple.

**6.4** Every gun is unique. Little grooves cut into the barrel of a firearm leave the same traces on every bullet discharged from it. So you might say that a gun gives the bullets its DNA. **a ballistic expert**

will carry out a comparative analysis to determine if a bullet was discharged from a particular gun. In 1964 the Judicial Police investigated the death of a man with a bullet through his forehead. Was it murder or suicide? The investigators brought in a ballistic expert to answer that question.

### **6.5 microscopic traces and soot zones**

Did the fatal bullet come from the carbine lying next to the deceased? That was the first question the expert had to answer. He did this by firing a comparative bullet from that firearm. The grooves on the comparative bullet were identical to those on the fatal bullet. So there was no doubt that the man had been killed by a bullet discharged from this gun.

What was the distance between the carbine and the victim? That was the second question. The answer would determine whether it was murder or suicide. The expert answered this question by comparing soot zones. Around the entry wound on the man's forehead there was a residue of soot left by the soot on the bullet. That soot zone was one-and-a-half centimetres in diameter. The expert test-fired the gun to determine the distance between the gun and the impact zone at which it produced a soot zone. Test fires revealed that the muzzle of the gun was one centimetre from the victim's forehead. Moreover, the reconstruction showed that he could have pulled the trigger of the carbine himself. So everything pointed to suicide.

**6.5.1** The grooves on the comparative bullet were the same as those on the fatal bullet.

**6.5.2** Soot zone and impact of a test shot.

**6.5.3** A reconstruction revealed that suicide with the gun was a possibility.

**6.6** When a page tears or a screwdriver breaks, the ***pieces fit*** together like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Sometimes detectives are able to solve a crime by piecing together parts of a puzzle until they have the complete picture. Sometimes it is clear to the naked eye that the pieces fit; sometimes a microscope is required.

In 1936 a professional burglar left behind a piece of the puzzle: the end of his twist drill broke off and got wedged in the safe he was trying to crack.

## **6.7 it's a match**

The burglar's big mistake was to keep 'his' piece of the broken-off drill. Months later detectives found it during a house search. There was no doubt about it. The two parts fitted together exactly.

**6.7.1** The footprints found at the crime scene were from the shoes of the perpetrator and a henchman.

## **6.8 power to the expert**

In the 1920s a renowned professor of pharmacology at Ghent University made his scientific expertise and the latest techniques available to detectives.

He found poison at an autopsy and on suspect objects, and remnants of blood on washed items of clothing. His findings often served as vital evidence.

However, it transpired that the professor was tampering with his research. He put poison in a body or onto suspect objects. In his desire to be a research hero, the professor sometimes invented the findings. It didn't bother him that he was responsible for innocent people serving life sentences. When the deception came to light, three cases had to be reviewed. Two men and a woman serving life sentences were released. Fortunately, those sort of mala fide experts are an exception.

**6.8.1** The investigation file into the professor's crimes.

**6.8.2** The professor's laboratory.

**6.9** Detectives have their hands full tracking down and examining fakes. Every object of any value has been copied at some stage. But every object also has its expert, who may use an **authenticity test** to check whether an object is the genuine article or a fake. In 1975 a philatelist from Lebbeke started producing counterfeit stamps. He modified genuine Guernsey stamps by applying spot remover to fade the red colour without damaging the layer of lacquer. The term 'postage stamp error' is used to describe a glitch in the intended appearance of the stamp which occurs during the production process. However,



our Lebbecke collector's aim was to deliberately create 'unique' error stamps because they are rare and consequently valuable. Philatelists love them.

### **6.10 swiss precision provides breakthrough**

The man sold his first falsified postage stamps to a specialist who didn't spot the deception. The philately world soon came to hear of the postage stamps. Buyers from England offered big money for the stamps from the man in Lebbecke.

After a while a buyer smelt a rat and tipped off the police. They called in the Swiss postage stamp producer for an authenticity test and discovered that the production error was deliberate. The man from Lebbecke had to explain himself to the judge.

**6.10.1** At the top the forged postage stamps, under neath the original.

**6.10.2** The forger managed to have his counterfeit stamps appear in a trade magazine in which they were offered for sale at 30,000 francs.

### **6.11 see the painter through the paint**

In the early 1980s suspicions were raised when hitherto unknown paintings by the Flemish landscape painter Valerius De Saedeleer (1867–1941) started turning up. The court brought in art experts to authenticate the paintings.

Sometimes experts can spot a fake with the naked eye. They then study the style, brushstroke, type of paint and the painter's signature. X-ray use and chemical analysis are common practice among art

authenticators. In the De Saedeleer case, the expert discovered acrylic resin on a suspect painting. This proved that the painting was a fake because that substance didn't exist in De Saedeleer's day.

## **6.12 the king's eyebrows**

Does the paper feel cheap? Is the watermark complete? Is there something hazardous about the printed figures? Does King Albert have bushy eyebrows? Anyone who answered 'yes' to each of these questions in 1949 was probably holding a 1,000-franc counterfeit banknote.

Experts from the National Bank closely examined each new counterfeit and passed on information about how to recognize a counterfeit note. Ghent's Judicial Police also received a telegram to that effect and passed

on the information to department stores and public services. They hoped this would enable them to track down those printing the counterfeit money.

In 1950 the police arrested scores of fraudsters paying with the counterfeit 1,000-franc notes. Those arrested had not printed the notes themselves, but they had bought them in Paris for a quarter of their value. The Belgian and French police departments worked together on the case. Statements made by the arrested Belgians led detectives to the illegal printing establishment. The fraudsters were caught in the act of printing counterfeit money.

**6.12.1** A telegram with information about a new counterfeit.

**6.12.2** A telegram with a description of two men attempting to exchange counterfeit money in the Turnhout area.

**6.12.3** These suspects bought 1000-franc notes but only paid 250 francs. Some sold the notes on to others for 485 francs.

**6.12.4** The 1000 -franc note is popular among counterfeiters. In the period after the Second World War several attempts were made to copy it.

### **6.13 a master crook**

In the 1970s an employee of an insurance company swindled his employer out of more than 100 million Belgian francs by submitting claims on behalf of non-existent companies. He was caught and charged with fraud. Having served his prison sentence, in 1983 he pulled off his next coup. He tampered with an unguaranteed

cheque, turning 10,000 francs into 76,910.000 francs. He knew the bank manager of a bank in Ghent personally and so was able to collect the money, no questions asked. He left the bank with millions and vanished without trace. However, ten years later an unknown man was found dead in his car in the south of France. A fingerprint check revealed that he was the missing fraudster.

**6.14** In 1922 a rich, single woman died in her house in Ghent. Written on a sheet of paper found in a cupboard was one sentence: "It is my wish that I revoke my Will of 1920." Underneath was the deceased woman's signature. The case was suspicious. Had the woman written those words herself? Or did her brother-in-law have a hand in it? Rumour had it that he had poisoned his sister-in-law.

The detectives regarded him as a suspect and brought in experts to carry out a comparative **handwriting analysis**.

### **6.15 words are but wind, the written letter remains**

The suspect brother-in-law stood to benefit substantially from the revocation of the 1920 Will. It would mean that the previous Will would come back into effect, allowing him to pocket a share of his sister-in-law's estate.

Experts judged that the suspect text had not been written by the woman. They saw characteristics of the brother-in-law's handwriting but they couldn't be absolutely sure. This was not his first offence. He had already married rich women and tried to pocket a share of the estate by criminal means.

However, the jury was in no doubt. The brother-in-law had poisoned the woman and forged the Will. His death sentence was converted into life imprisonment.

**6.15.1** The expert compared the suspect handwriting letter by letter with the handwriting of the deceased woman.

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**6.16.1** The detectives found traces at the crime scene and made casts of them. Later on they were able to compare them to objects they could link to suspects.

**6.16.2** Plaster cast of trace evidence of a break-in.

**6.16.3** A handwriting expert does comparative research.

**6.16.4** A comparison between locks, keys and traces of a break-in with burglary tools betrayed the burglar's modus operandi.

### **6.16.5 finger mark versus fingerprint**

Dactyloscopy is the science of making finger marks visible and then classifying and identifying them.

Scientific interest in fingerprints originated in the seventeenth century. In the nineteenth century, scientists discovered that every fingerprint is unique. At the end of that century, the first crimes were solved using the newly developed fingerprinting technique of dactyloscopy. These days the use of fingerprints in the identification of criminals is the most frequently applied technique in forensic science.

**6.16.6** The police lab compares finger marks found at the scene with fingerprints of suspects.

**6.16.7** Every fingerprint is unique. Even quadruplets have different fingerprints.

### **6.16.8 cocaine or icing sugar?**

Is it poison, heroin or soap powder? Detectives have to be able to identify suspicious substances very quickly. Chemical tests carried out in a laboratory determine which product it is. With the help of special testing kits, laboratory technicians can also distinguish a substance on the spot.

## 7. **silent witness**

Dead or alive, a body can divulge a substantial amount of information. By examining corpses, forensic experts can learn a great deal about the circumstances of a crime. By carrying out an autopsy, a police physician can establish the cause and time of death. The study of insects on and in the body – entomology – can also help determine the time of death. Studying a person's wounds provides information about the weapon used, whether it was a knife, a firearm or poison. Where poisoning is suspected, the police physician will take a sample for further toxicological examination.

***Some viewers  
may find the photographs  
on show in this gallery  
shocking.***

## **7.1 the murderer who isn't a murderer**

On September 12th 1991, a woman in Eeklo alerted the police to maggots and a rotting smell emanating from her neighbour's house. When the police physician entered the house in question, he found a body in an advanced stage of decomposition. As it was not possible to establish the cause of death from an external examination, the police physician performed an autopsy. The victim was a friend of the occupant of the house. The occupant hadn't reported the death, fearing that he had killed his friend during an argument. But the examination proved otherwise. The friend had died of a stroke. Though the stress of the argument may have been a contributory factor, it was nevertheless a natu-

ral death. There was no evidence to suggest that the occupant was a murderer.

## **7.2 an insect time line**

A dead body is a source of food and life for insects. In their turn those insects are a source of information for detectives.

Entomology is the study of insects. Forensic entomology is the study of insects on dead bodies in criminal investigation. Different sorts of insects are attracted to the corpse at the various stages of decomposition. So entomologists draw up a timeline of the sorts of insects which have come and gone on a dead body. By identifying the insects on and around a corpse, an entomologist can estimate the post-mortem index, i.e. how long that individual has been dead.

**7.2.1** A timeline of insects which colonize a corpse.

**7.2.2** In the early 1950s Ghent's Judicial Police started to pay more attention to entomology, drawing on work done by Professor Leclercq from Liège.

### **7.3 which of the gunmen is the murderer?**

One evening in 1945, two armed men rang the doorbell of a house in Ronse. When the woman who lived there opened the door, the men started shooting. The woman tried to close the door, but the men went on firing until she was dead. The two men were arrested. But which of the two had fired the deadly shots? A ballistics expert arrived at the scene of the crime to establish the trajectory of the bullets. During the autopsy, the police physician ascertained which

wounds were inflicted by which bullets. He produced a sketch to indicate the bullet trajectories. They showed that both men had hit the woman. So they were both guilty.

### **7.4 the weapon and the wound**

In 1926 a young man disappeared after an evening out in Beernem. Later he was found dead in the canal. Though the young man had a head wound, it was not examined thoroughly during the initial investigation. It appeared to be suicide or an accident. Two acquaintances of the victim, who were the last people to see him, said that he was drunk and despondent after the breakdown of a relationship. That story didn't ring true. But why would the men lie? Could they possibly be covering up a crime? During a search of the house of



one of the men, detectives found bloodstains and a hammer. Could that hammer have been used to inflict the head wound? During a second autopsy, the wound was compared to the weapon. The police physician was in no doubt: the hammer was the murder weapon. The two acquaintances were convicted of manslaughter.

**7.4.1** Investigators found blood spatters and a hammer in a shed near the suspect's house. During the autopsy, microscopic specimens were taken of the victim's hair and blood.

**7.4.2** To establish whether or not the head wound had been inflicted by the retrieved hammer, the police physician used a test skull, i.e. a piece of tin in the shape of a skull, covered with a layer of wax. The police physician hit the test skull with the 'suspect' hammer. Microscopic photographs revealed that the traces were the same.

**7.4.3** This case was one of 'the Beernem murders'. Between 1915 and 1944 there were several suspected murders and disappearances in the region. Rumour had it that an influential aristocrat from the village stood to benefit from the first murder. The subsequent murders were to silence the people who knew too much. The aristocrat was thought to have contracted the murders. He used his noble origins to try and influence the court. That hypothesis however could never be proved. 'The Beernem murders' were made famous in the region by journalist Victor De Lille who gave considerable coverage to the case in his newspaper *'t Getrouwe Maldeghem*. The VRT television series *De bossen van Vlaanderen* in the 1990s was a romanticized version of the events.

## **7.5 a poisoner unmasked**

A toxicological examination reveals poisonous substances, medicines or drugs present in a body. A toxicological examination can be carried out during an autopsy, but it can also be performed on living persons. In 1984 a toxicological inspection saved the life of a man from Eeklo. He had been referred to the Academic Hospital in Ghent with symptoms of fatigue, balance disorder and hair loss. His body was found to contain a large quantity of rat poison.

In recent years the man had been admitted to hospital on several occasions. He recovered each time, but once he was back home the symptoms returned. The police opened an enquiry. Could he have been poisoned? His wife was the logical suspect, but she

denied wrongdoing. However, enquiries in the local area revealed that her first husband had died of the same symptoms ten years earlier.

The police exhumed the body of the suspect's first husband and found it surprisingly well preserved. A toxicological examination showed that the corpse contained a large quantity of rat poison. The woman confessed. She was found guilty of murdering her first husband and of attempting to murder her second husband. Her method? A tablespoonful of poison in his soup every day for a couple of weeks.

**7.5.1** Hair loss was one of the symptoms of the poisoning. The victim would recover and his hair grew back.

**7.5.2** During the reconstruction, the woman demonstrated how she had set to work.

## **7.6 chronicle of a violent death**

Apart from the cause of death, an autopsy also brings to light other details of the crime, such as the way the wounds were inflicted. Is the suspect weapon compatible with the wound? On which side or from which direction was the victim attacked? Which hand did the perpetrator use to wield the weapon? The police physician completes an autopsy report based on precise measurements of the wounds, the direction from which the wound was inflicted and the force used. That report is likely to contain critical information for the detectives.

**7.6.1** Autopsy Room,  
Rommelaere complex,  
Ghent University

## 8. **banned!**

The collection held in the Judicial Police Museum contained an assortment of seized goods: forged paintings, pornographic material, weapons, games of chance, drugs, etc. The government charged the police with the seizure of these items so as to protect citizens from fraud, indecency and violence.

Many of the objects you see here are not recognized today, others are no longer regarded as illicit. Crime evolves, society's norms change and the legislator adapts the criminal laws accordingly. This also impacts on the job of the police.

## 8.1 drugs

The Judicial Police trained its police force to recognize different sorts of drugs and other illegal substances, such as marihuana, opium, morphine and cocaine. But they also seized all manner of objects involved in drug use, such as scales and pipes. Over the years the government's drug policy has changed. The priority has shifted from prosecuting individual users to rounding up international networks of drug dealers. A policy of tolerance is applied to soft drugs.

## 8.2 unlawful medicine

Like many other professions in the care sector, being a doctor is a regulated profession. It can only be practised by a person in possession of the appropriate diploma, who is registered with the competent authority. If not,

they can be punished for the unauthorized practice of medicine. So in the case of self-certified doctors and dentists, the police seized certain instruments and anaesthetics.

Some treatments and medicines have always been banned, even if a doctor prescribes or administers them. What is allowed and what isn't, is subject to social evolution and often the subject of debate.

Take, for example, the discussions about abortion, euthanasia and alternative medicine.

**8.2.1** After a long struggle, in 1990 the Belgian parliament passed the abortion law. In an 'emergency', a termination within the twelfth week after conception was no longer punishable and so could at last be performed by a doctor in a hospital. The unhygienic backrooms and dangerous procedures were now a thing of the past.

Abortionists used to be known as 'angel makers', but all too often the abortion also terminated the life of the pregnant woman. Doctors, too, performed illegal abortions. If they were snitched on, the Judicial Police would seize needles, pills and other prerequisites.

### **8.3 fakes**

Falsifying or selling number plates, bicycle plates, money, ID cards and other official documents is punishable. Only the government is authorized to publish such documents. Passing off worthless items as valuable, such as copies of famous brands, is also unlawful. When the police seize forged paintings, they apply an identifying mark so that the work can no longer be sold as the genuine article.

### **8.4 weapons**

A whole range of weapons are banned by law, including knuckle-dusters, flick knives, ninja stars, nunchakus, pepper spray, 'alarm guns' (converted from replica to real) and concealed weapons (which at first glance resemble another object). You are not allowed to manufacture or repair these weapons, buy or sell them, own or transport them, nor are you even allowed to carry them. The police will seize them. Which weapons are freely available and which are banned changes with time. You need a licence to own a number of different weapons. Possessing ammunition and carrying a firearm are also licensable. Even weapons which cannot be fired, such as imitation weapons or alarm guns, are sometimes seized. If the weapon could present a

danger in certain circumstances, it will also be confiscated.

### **8.5 games of chance**

Gambling is a controversial practice. In many countries it is regulated by law, but there is rarely a total ban. What is banned, tolerated or permitted evolves over time.

Ghent's Judicial Police has dealt with games of chance of every description: card-playing in private clubs, games like dice and fruit machines in premises selling alcohol, chain letters and clandestine wagers. Businesses wishing to provide certain types of gaming had to apply for a licence. The police would check on places where gambling was practised with or without a licence and seize illegal or manipulated games.

### **8.6 ethics**

One of the areas where social judgment has changed is 'ethics'. Until the 1970s, the police seized large quantities of pornography and sex toys, which nowadays are regarded as acceptable. For a long time, it was against the law to make, diffuse or sell 'obscene' images and texts. It was believed that pornography would lead to moral decline and above all that it was detrimental to young people. Social attitudes began to change in the 1960s and 70s. The 'sexual' revolution removed much of the shame and blame associated with sexual matters. Pornographic magazines are now displayed on the shelves in shops, rather than stowed away under the counter as before. You are allowed to look at,

buy and produce pornography, subject to certain conditions. Child pornography carries hefty punishments. Coercion to engage in pornography is also unlawful.

### 8.6.1 at the cinema

Ghent film festival was out to shock. So during the first edition in 1974, the University Film Club showed 18 films designed to provoke. At Studio Skoop the programme for the third edition, in 1976, featured the film *A History of the Blue Movie* (in French: *Anthologie du Plaisir*), a compilation of striptease, nude and sex scenes filmed in Hollywood between 1915 and 1970.

The law of the time deemed the film an offence against public decency. The police were sitting in the cinema and soon stopped the film screening. Legal action was taken against the organizers of the film festival for screening pornography in public. They tried

to circumvent the obscenity law by framing the found footage as 'historical' and 'documentary' images. A petition bearing 1,000 signatures was unable to overturn the decision to seize the film.

### 8.6.2 in the record shop

In 1969, an angry mother reported to the police that her 15-year-old son had purchased the single *Je t'aime moi non plus* (1969) by Serge Gainsbourg and Jane Birkin from a music shop in Ghent. Both the lyrics and the groaning and gasping in the background, she believed, "undermined morality". The police went along to the shop to check it out. However, the song was not on the list of banned records, so the police did not take the complaint any further. But the mother was not alone in her opinion. After a barrage of complaints about the 'obscene' song in many European countries, Philips Records removed the single from the market.