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WESTERN AUSTRALIAN museum MARITIME

Information

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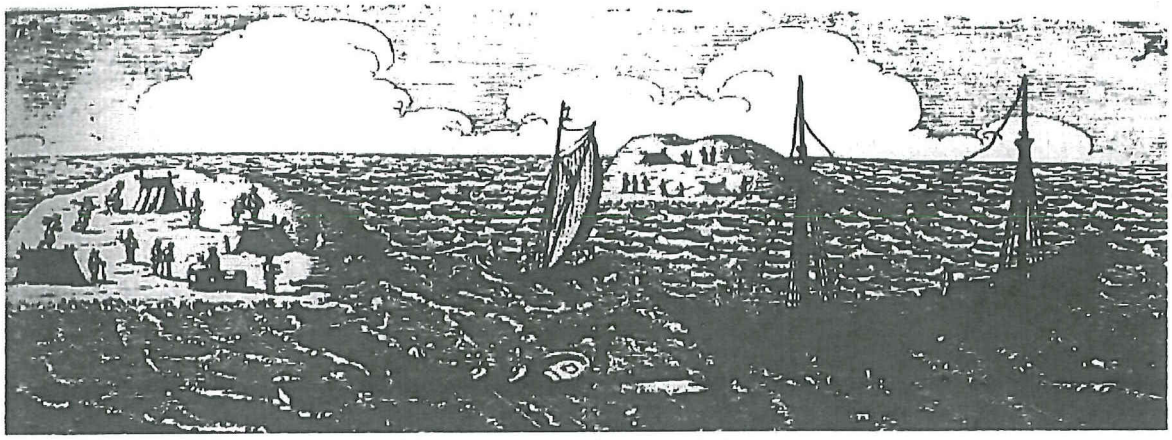

Scene of the Batavia mutiny from Ongeluckige *Voyagie.*

The *Batavia* Story

The Dutch East Indiaman *Batavia*, wrecked in 1629 on Morning Reef in the Wallabi Group of the Abrolhos Islands, was the first of the *Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC) ships to be lost off the coast of the Southland (Australia).

The story of the wreck, and the subsequent treachery and murders, captured the interest of the Dutch public in the 17th century. An account of the disaster was published in Amsterdam, in 1648, in a richly illustrated book by Jan Jansz—*Ongeluckige Voyagie, Van't Schip Batavia, Nae de Oost-Indien* (Unlucky Voyage of the Ship *Batavia* to the East Indies).

The *Batavia*, flagship of a convoy, left Texel on 28 October 1628 under the command of Francisco Pelsaert, bound for the VOC's trading centre Batavia (modern Jakarta). About 316 people were on board, including women and children.

Plans for mutiny, led by the under-merchant, Jeronimus Cornelisz, with certain officers and crew, were already well underway when the ship struck a reef in the early morning of 4 June 1629. The night watch had sighted white surf ahead but had assumed it was moonlight reflected from the waves.

More than 250 of the people on board managed to reach nearby small islands, but little water or food was saved from the wreck.

Commander Pelsaert, skipper Jacobsz and 46 crew took the *Batavia*'s two small boats the next day in search of water. The trip was unsuccessful and a decision was made to continue to Batavia to get help and rescue for the castaways. Meanwhile, Jeronimus Cornelisz set himself in charge of the people on the island, planning to capture the rescue ship when it arrived with Pelsaert from Batavia. He arranged for most of the ship's soldiers to be taken to a 'High Island' (West Wallabi Island) ostensibly to search for water. Leaving them stranded, Cornelisz then appointed himself 'Governor' and ordered his 'officers' to slaughter all those opposed to the mutiny.

Cornelisz' plan may have worked if the soldiers had not managed to find fresh water and survive on birds, seals and wallabies. Hearing of the massacres on the other island from a survivor, they built a shelter of coral slabs and waited for Cornelisz to attack. When he did, they were able to repulse the first attack and capture Cornelisz on the second attack. Three months had passed when Pelsaert returned in the *Sardam*. He was met, as he disembarked, by Wiebbe Hayes, the leader of the 'High Island' soldiers, who told him of the mutiny. Forewarned, Pelsaert was quickly able to capture Cornelisz' men.

In Pelsaert's absence, 125 men, women and children had been murdered on the island which became known as '*Batavia*'s Graveyard'—now Beacon Island.

Horrified by the events, and perhaps not knowing if the small *Sardam* could safely hold so many prisoners, Pelsaert decided to bring the mutineers to trial on the spot.

Cornelisz was hanged after having both his hands cut off, others were executed, keelhauled or lashed. Two mutineers were put ashore on the mainland and left. Nothing was ever heard of them again.

Pelsaert succeeded in salvaging all but one of the chests of money which went down with the *Batavia*. However, this was not enough to win him favour with the VOC. He was heavily criticised for not staying, as highest in command, with the shipwreck survivors.

This, combined with rumours that he had engaged in private trade—a practice against VOC rules—led to his rapid decline in the Company. He died the following year.

Suggested further reading:

Buttsworth, Lyn, 1987, Mutiny on the Abrolhos. Western Australian Museum, Perth.
Crew, Gary, 1991, *Strange objects*. Mammoth, Reed Book.
Drake-Brockman, Henrietta, 1963, *Voyage to disaster*. Angus & Robertson, Sydney.
Edwards, Hugh, 1966, *Islands of angry ghosts*. Angus & Robertson, Sydney.
Godard, Philippe, 1993, *First and last voyage of the* Batavia. Abrolhos Publishing, Perth.
Lisson, Deborah, 1990, *The devils own*. Walter McVilty Books, Australia.

Available from the bookshop at the Maritime Museum

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Dirk Hartog and the *Eendracht*

One hundred and fifty-four years before James Cook sighted the eastern coast of Australia, the skipper of a vessel of the Dutch East India Company fleet (Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie - VOC). landed on the western coastline. The ship was the *Eendracht*, the skipper Dirk Hartog, the year 1616.

Before 1611, Dutch merchant ships sailing to Java had used the 'old' route to the Indies, originally discovered by the Portuguese sailor, Vasco da Gama, in 1497. This involved sailing close to the eastern coast of Africa northward to India and then eastwards to Java. Successive modifications to this route took deeper and deeper swings into the Indian Ocean before turning northwards, but the voyage still took about a year.

A new route to Java

In 1611 Hendrik Brouwer pioneered a new route. He sailed south from the Cape of Good Hope until the prevailing westerly winds were encountered, eastward until the ship's position was calculated as being south of Sunda Strait, then northward for the run to Java. He reached Bantam after a voyage of only five months and twenty-four days.

Dirk Hartog's pewter plate.

As this new route cut the voyage time by about half, it was soon adopted as the official route for VOC ships There was, however, one major problem. Ships of the time were equipped with instruments such as the astrolabe that were satisfactory for the measurement of latitude, but no instrument existed for the accurate determination of longitude. This was estimated by the use of the compass (course) and the log (speed through the water). Such a system of 'dead reckoning' allowed considerable discrepancies; so it was inevitable that some East Indiaman would inadvertently sail too far eastwards before turning north and thus stumble upon the western coastline of Australia. That man was Dirk Hartog.

Born of a Dutch sea-faring family in 1580, Dirk Hartog probably went to sea at an early age. He commanded his first ship in 1610, brought his own vessel in 1611 and during the next five years made a number of successful trading voyages to Baltic and Mediterranean ports.

The voyage of the *Eendracht*

In 1615 Dirk Hartog entered the service of the United East India Company and was appointed master of the *Eendracht* for a voyage to Java. The *Eendracht* left Texel In January 1616 in company with a number of other VOC ships. After a most unpleasant voyage, the *Eendracht* reached the Cape of Good Hope along, having become separated from the rest of the fleet in a storm.

Leaving the Cape, Hartog sailed south-east on Brouwer's route to pick up the 'roaring forties', the prevailing westerly winds which carried them across the Indian Ocean. He continued eastwards until, somewhat to his surprise, land was sighted at 26° south latitude on the 25 October 1616.

The *Eendracht* was brought to anchor off an island behind which could be see a vast mainland. Dirk Hartog examined the area thoroughly for two days, but could find nothing he considered of value or interest.

Before leaving, a post bearing a flattened pewter dinner plate was erected. A translation of the inscription on the plate reads:

> *The 25th October is here arrived the ship* Eendracht *of Amsterdam, the upper merchant Gilles Miebias of Leige, Skipper Dirck Hartichs of Amsterdam. The 27th ditto we sail for Bantum, the under merchant Jan Stins the upper steersman Pieter Doores of Brielle. Anno 1616.*

The roads at which the ship had been lying and the island where the plate was erected were named Dirk Hartog Roads and Dirk Hartog Island, respectively.

The *Eendracht* sailed northward, accurately charting the coastline to 22°S. The newly discovered area was named 'Eendrachtsland' and remained known by that name for nearly two hundred years.

Leaving the barren inhospitable coastline, Hartog continued his voyage to Bantam, arriving in December 1616, five months overdue.

The Dutch East India Company many not have been too pleased with the length of Hartog's voyage and the fact that he had found nothing of value to them in the south-land and may not have offered him another command. Whatever the reason, on his return to Amsterdam in 1617, Hartog resigned from the Company and again went into private trading, make a number of profitable voyages to the Baltic.

Dirk Hartog died in 1621, aged 41 years. He was, as far is known, the first European to set foot on the western coast of Australia.

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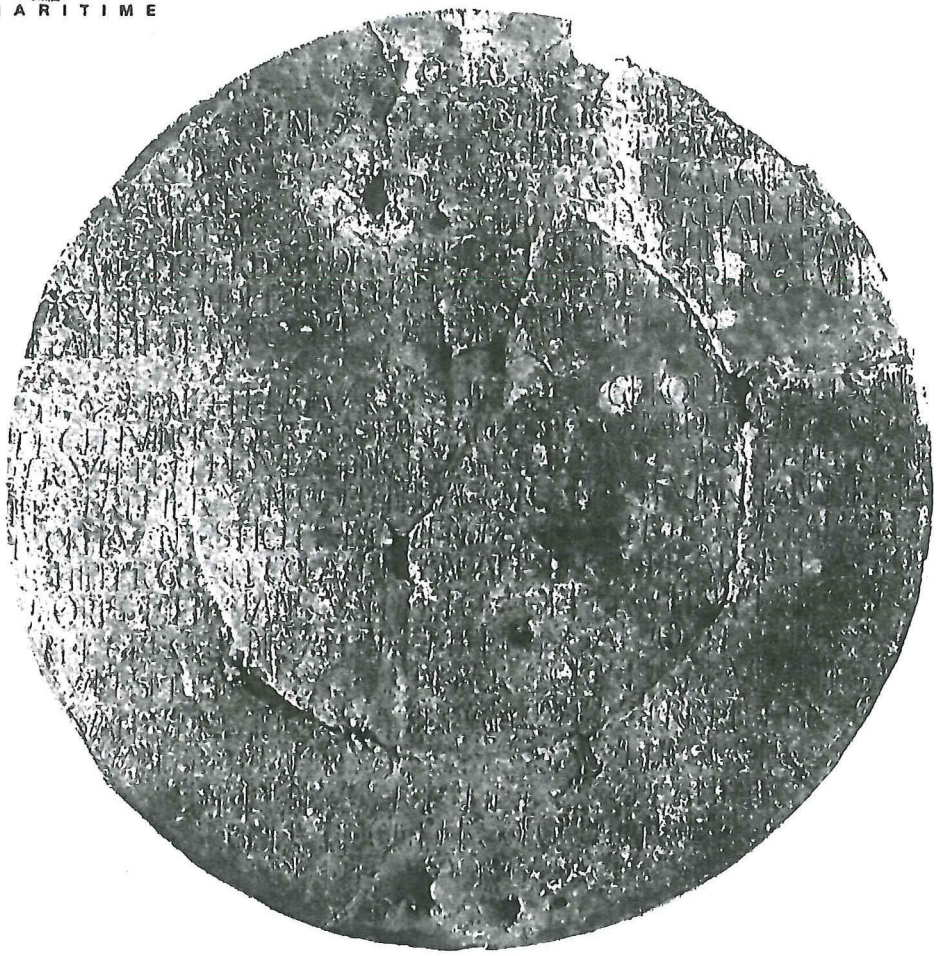

The Vlamingh Plate

In February 1697 the Dutch explorer Willem de Vlamingh arrived off Shark Bay. On Dirk Hartog Island a landing party found an old flattened pewter plate lying in the sand at the base of a tall wooden post. On the plate was inscribed a record of the first landfall on the Western Australian coast, by the Dutch navigator Dirk Hartog, in 1616. Recognising the plate's significance, Vlamingh took it to Batavia (modern Djakarta) and in its place left a plate of his own, nailed to a new post.

Vlamingh's plate bore a copy of Hartog's inscription in addition to one recording his own visit. Hartog's plate was returned to Holland and eventually passed to the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, where it remains to this day.

In 1801, 104 years later, Vlamingh's plate was discovered on Dirk Hartog Island by the French Captain Emmanuel Hamelin of the corvette *Naturaliste*, on a voyage of discovery around Australia. The plate had fallen from its post, but he refused to remove it and re-erected it on a new post, despite the entreaties of his junior Lieutenant, Louis de Freycinet. Seventeen years later in 1818, de Freycinet in command of his own vessel, was able to recover the Vlamingh plate. After many vicissitudes, including shipwreck of the Falkland Islands, it was presented to the French Academy in Paris.

Then for more than a century the Vlamingh Plate disappeared. Leading nineteenth century scholars were unable to examine it and had to make do with de Freycinet's published illustration. But in 1940, in the darkest days of World War II, it was found in a small room, on the bottom shelf, jumbled up with old copper engravings.

Given the state of the war, its discovery was not announced until December 1944, after the liberation of Paris. An academic account of the discovery was seen by an Australian at Oxford University and he alerted the Australian authorities.

On 28 May 1947 the French Ambassador presented the Vlamingh Plate to the Prime Minister, the Rt Hon J B Chifley. The Commonwealth Government proposed keeping the original and presenting the replicas to Western Australia and to Victoria, which had expressed an early interest in it. But Western Australia was particularly unenthusiastic; over the next three years strong representations were made for its return to this State. As a result of personal intervention with the Prime Minister (Sir Robert Menzies) by Sir Paul Hasluck, then MHR for Curtin WA, the plate was returned to Western Australia. On 5 June 1950 Sir Paul presented it to the State Government; they in turn placed it in the Museum for permanent display.

The Vlamingh Plate remains one of the most priceless relics in the State's collections, and is normally displayed at the Western Australian Maritime Museum, Fremantle. Not only is the plate one of Australia's earliest 'documents', it also serves as a memorial of the early exploration and description of the Western Australian coast by the Dutch.

In 1979, during the State's sesquicentenary celebrations, the Vlamingh Plate, the actual chart made at the time of Vlamingh's visit and a set of watercolours depicting coastal views, including one of Dirk Hartog Island with the plate on its post, were all on display in the Museum's Fremantle Branch, together for the first time in nearly three centuries. Nine years later, during Australia's bicentenary, the Hartog and Vlamingh Plates came together again for the first time in 291 years, as a result of the Rijksmuseum's agreement to lend the Hartog Plate for the traveling exhibition 'Shipwreck', which opened its national tour in Perth in January, 1988.

The Vlamingh Plate is preserved in an atmosphere of an inert gas, argon, to allay any possible further corrosion. In translation the inscription reads:

The first third is a copy of Dirk Hartog's inscription of 1616. The translation is literal. In more modern terms, 'senior' could replace 'upper' (merchant), 'junior' could be used for 'under' (merchant), 'master' for 'skipper', 'first mate' for 'upper steersman'. The departure date ('twelfth') is missing between the words 'the' and 'also' on the third last line. The hooker *'Nyptangh'* was a three-masted vessel, the galliot *'Weeseltie'* was smaller and two-masted; the *'Geelvinck'* was a three-masted frigate.

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