

Yet Another Old Dutch Shipwreck in WA?

Readers of *Map Matters* may be familiar with the Australia on the Map Division project, "Search for the Deadwater Wreck". This project, despite some setbacks, is still in progress. The Deadwater Wreck project is endeavouring to locate the remains of what is believed to be a Dutch shipwreck from 1650 - 1750, just north of Busselton in WA. The identification is based on a number of reports from highly credible sources in the second half of 19th century, including the Receiver of Wrecks, and the fact the wreck was subject to two salvage claims in that period. However, there is now an argument being put forward that yet another wreck exists in the Pelsaert (Southern) Group of the Abrolhos Islands, off the central west coast of WA.

Rumours of such a wreck have circulated for some time. But recently, at the Australia-Dutch Heritage Day in Fremantle, Hugh Edwards AO, gave a presentation setting out the case for the wreck's existence. Hugh is well known in maritime archaeology, being involved in the discovery of the famous *Batavia* (1629), as well as the *Zeewijk* (1727), and assisting in the excavation of other historic wrecks in WA such as the *Vergulde Draeck* (1656) and *Zuytdorp* (1712). He is also author of *The Wreck on the Half-Moon Reef*, a very popular account of the wrecking of the *Zeewijk*, the events that followed and the expeditions he led in the 1960s which located cannons, anchors and the main part of the wreck. The location of the wreck of the *Zeewijk* is integral to the claim that there is another wreck in this locality.

The *Zeewijk* struck Half-Moon Reef (the outer reef in photo below) on the evening of 9 June 1727, another victim of the problem of determining longitude and careless navigation. Most of those onboard survived and based themselves on Gun Island (island in northwest quadrant) where they subsisted on birds, seals and the like.



Pelsaert (Southern) Group of Abrolhos Island

A boat with 12 men, led by First Mate Pieter Langeweg, was sent to get help but was never heard of again. So after waiting five months the remaining survivors then set about building a 20 m boat from the wreckage, the *Sloepie*, the first ocean-going vessel built by Europeans in Australia. This took four months. They then set sail for Java and 82 men safely reached their destination.

Hugh Edwards is now suggesting there was a second wreck in the same area as the *Zeewijk*, and that the ship in question may be the *Aagtekerke*, which disappeared in 1726, the year before the *Zeewijk* came to grief. This identification complicates the situation as the *Aagtekerke* was a sister ship of the *Zeewijk*, and so both ships, built in 1725 and 1726, were nearly identical.



Hugh Edwards with ivory tusk from wreck 'spill'

The case put forward by Edwards is based on the proposition that there are two concentrations of wreckage on Half-Moon Reef (both outside the reef but 2-300m apart), that the number of cannons and anchors that have been found exceeds the number carried by the *Zeewijk*, that the *Zeewijk* survivors reported finding evidence of prior human presence, and that they observed wreckage from another vessel in the area. In effect he is arguing that both the *Zeewijk* and the *Aagtekerke* were wrecked in almost the same spot. One means of distinguishing the wrecks is the cargo, and Edwards argues that the *Aagtekerke* was carrying a large quantity of ivory tusks, whereas the *Zeewijk* wasn't (see photo above).

Putting the contrary view has been Jeremy Green, Head of the Maritime Archaeology Department of Western Australian Museum. He has suggested that there is no excess of cannon and anchors, that the ivory tusks which have been found were private cargo

carried by the *Zeewijk*, and that the wreckage the *Zeewijk* survivors observed was from another wrecksite in the Abrolhos Islands, and not from another wreck at the *Zeewijk* site. As for part of the evidence of previous human presence, a well, Green suggests it may have been dug by the boat crew from the *Vergulde Draeck*, on their way to Batavia [Jakarta] in May 1656 to raise the alarm.

One highly contentious element has been the reference in the journal of Second Mate Adriaen van der Graeff to material indicating prior human presence. The debate centres on which transcription of the journal is the most valid source, and the translation of reference to a 'honds geraemte' ('dog's skeleton') or 'gevolde handgranaad' ('filled hand-grenade')

Undoubtedly we will hear more about this in the future. The Maritime Archaeology Department acknowledge that there is possibly another wreck in the Southern Group of the Abrolhos. So the cat is out of the bag so to speak, and if any new evidence does turn up, it will certainly create a sensation.

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