

Who were these Dutch, and how did they come to be living in Australia 169 years before British settlement?

All were travelling on *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC)/Dutch East India Company vessels. Most were mariners — gunners, soldiers, cabin boys, officers, cadets, cooks and the like — but some were also passengers — company clerks, wives on their way to join their husbands in Batavia, wives of crew members, their children, their maids and their relatives.² The circumstances in which these unfortunate Hollanders and some from other nationalities, unwillingly and dramatically commenced new lives in Western Australia, are surprisingly well documented. What became of those folk, probably exceeding 200 in number, is more of a mystery and their ultimate fate is not known with any certainty. Nevertheless there is reason to believe some did survive and prosper.

THE EVENTS UNFOLD

There was no single event responsible for leaving this noteworthy number of people marooned forever on the coast of Western Australia, but rather a series of events between 1629 and 1712. The first occurred around noon, on 16 November 1629, when the VOC vessel *Sardam*, sailed into Broken Anchor Bay, a shallow inlet at the mouth of the Hutt River, 450 kilometres north of present day Perth.³ The captain of the *Sardam*, Francisco Pelsaert, noted that this had been the same ‘small Inlet where on 8 June when in the long boat searching for water, we thought to run in’.⁴ Pelsaert decided that, ‘At this good opportunity, I have ordered the two sentenced delinquents, to wit, Wouter Loos and Jan Pelgrom de By van Bemel, with a Champan provided with everything, to sail to this land.’⁵ Hence they became the very first Europeans to take up residence in Australia. Why this happened is as remarkable as the event itself.

Loos and de Bye had been crew members on board the ill-fated *Batavia*,⁶ which had tragically run aground on Morning Reef in the Wallabi Group of the Abrolhos Islands in the early hours of 4 June 1629. Those who could, scrambled off the wreckage and made their way to nearby islands in boats, on flotsam and by swimming. These survivors’ first priority was to find water. Other nearby islands were searched, but without success. Pelsaert then decided to take a yawl, with about 40 crew to the mainland to continue the search. Just as they approached the coast on 9 June, a winter storm struck and they nearly sank. They rode out the storm and headed north, but still could not find water. In the end Pelsaert and his crew decided to make for Batavia [Djakarta]. Suffering great thirst and hunger they arrived there on 7 July 1656. Pelsaert was given command of the *Sardam* and aimed to



Figure 2
Wiebbe Hayes Fort – West Wallabi Island:
Courtesy: Wendy van Duivenvoorde, WA
Maritime Museum.



Figure 3
A 1647 engraving showing the Beacon
Island massacre of survivors of the
Batavia shipwreck.
Courtesy: WA Museum.

go back as soon as possible, to find the approximately 230 people who were left behind. However, it was not until early September that it was possible to leave Batavia.

On arrival along the Western Australian coast, he spent three frustrating weeks trying to locate the islands where the *Batavia* had gone down. When he finally found them, he was confronted by unspeakable horrors that had taken place in his absence; 125 of the survivors had been murdered by a small band of cut throats and mutineers.

The *Batavia* Mutiny was a plot hatched and led by the Under Merchant Jeronimus Corneliszoon. Initially he and his confederates acted secretly, managing to trick a body of soldiers into going to a nearby island, East Wallabi where they thought they would die of thirst or starvation. With most of the soldiers out of the way, Corneliszoon and his fellow mutineers then engaged in an orgy of rape and bloodshed. However, the soldiers they had abandoned, rather than dying, had all moved to West Wallabi Island where they found water and prospered, having also found birds' eggs, seals and tamar wallabies. The Defenders, as they became known, were then joined by a handful of individuals who had managed to escape from the mutineers and to warn them about what was taking place. The mutineers subsequently launched three attacks on the Defenders, who, ably led by a soldier named Webbie Hayes, stoutly resisted. The first two attacks were completely inept and resulted in the Defenders capturing Corneliszoon. The mutineers then elected one of their number, the 24 year-old soldier Wouter Loos, as their new leader. He now led the third and most effective attack, in the midst of which Pelsaert, after his weeks of searching, miraculously appeared in the *Sardam* and put down the mutiny.⁷

The next two months were spent in salvaging what they could from the *Batavia* and interrogating and trying the mutineers.⁸ On 2 October, seven mutineers were hanged, most having hands chopped off prior to their execution. One of the condemned men, an 18 year-old cabin-boy Jan Pelgrom de Bye, pleaded for his life and was given a last-minute reprieve because of his age. Wouter Loos also escaped execution because of a lack of evidence, the result of his ability to resist the application of judicial torture, a normal



Figure 4
Hangings *Batavia* shipwreck
Courtesy: WA Museum.

part of investigations at the time.⁹ Pelsaert decided instead to maroon both on the mainland, 'in order to know once, for certain, what happens in the Land', with the view to retrieving them in the future.¹⁰ Abel Tasman was instructed to look out for them on his second voyage to Australia in 1644.¹¹

The 'delinquents' were given a flat-bottomed boat and provisions and told to:

'put ashore ... [and] to make themselves known to the folk of this land by tokens of friendship. Whereto are being given, by the Commandeur, some Nurembergen [wooden toys and trifles], as well as knives, Beads, bells and small mirrors, of which you shall give to the Blacks only a few until they have grown familiar with them.

Having become known to them, if they take you into their Villages to their chief men, have courage to go with them willingly. Man's luck is found in strange places; if God guards you, you will not suffer any damage from them, but on the contrary, because they have never seen any white men, they will offer all friendship.'¹²

What happened to these two men thereafter remains a mystery. We shall probably never know, but there are certainly some interesting coincidences that could be associated with their abandonment.

For example in 1839, Lt. George Grey and other members of his expedition set out to seek a site for settlement in north-western Australia. They noted on 4 April, following a series of mishaps at Shark Bay and Murchison River, and when struggling back to Perth on foot, that they had come across some yam fields, many square kilometres in extent, [and] 'as far as we could see'. According to Grey the location [of these] was a little to the North of Hutt River.¹³ He even commented that 'more had been done here to secure a provision from the ground by hard labour than I could believe in the power of uncivilised man.'¹⁴ Explorer and surveyor Augustus Charles Gregory (1819-1905)¹⁵ later reported that the people from this region, the *Nhanda*, 'never dug up a yam without replanting the crown in the same hole'.¹⁶

Grey's party also noted when they reached Hutt River on 5 April that they had passed the first of:

'two native villages, or, as the men termed them, towns, — with huts ... larger, more strongly built, and very nicely plastered over the outside with clay, and clods of turf ...'.¹⁷

The first village was in fact only a matter of 200 metres or so from where the fresh water was located by Pelsaert's crew on the day when they abandoned the two mutineers.¹⁸

Following the Batavia Mutiny, it would be another 27 years before more passengers and crew from a VOC ship found themselves stranded on the Western Australian coast, with little hope of salvation.

The next event occurred in the early hours of 28 April 1656, the *Vergulde Draeck*, with 193 people on board, struck a reef a little over five kilometres off the coast, south of what is now known as Ledge Point, 100 kilometres north of Perth. Little is known of what actually happened, though it appears only 75 made it to shore. Whether they were just the sailors, or included wives and children, as there were a number of women on board, is uncertain. It is known however, that they were experiencing considerable difficulties; ‘nothing was saved’ from the wreck, and they were subsisting on the ‘very few provisions thrown on the beach by the waves.’ A ‘*schuyt*’, a boat with sails manned by the Under-Steersman and six sailors, was sent to sail back to Batavia for help and miraculously reached its destination on 7 June.¹⁹ The sailors informed the Governor-General of the Indies in Batavia, that the 68 people left on the shore were ‘about to go looking for provisions and drinking water inland’²⁰

Two ships, the *Witte Valk* and the *Goede Hoop* were immediately despatched to attempt to locate and rescue the stranded survivors. The *Witte Valk* returned without having even landed a shore party because of the wild winter weather.²¹ The *Goede Hoop* did, however, have greater initial success, and ‘landed on the mentioned latitude [30° 40’S] with the boat.’ The shore party had proceeded ‘several *mijlen* inland’, presumably through the dense wattle and coastal heath found in the area, only to lose three sailors in the bush.²² The next day, when they sent a boat with a crew of eight to look for the lost sailors, it overturned close to the shore.²³ Later, the skipper landed and found that the boat had been ‘*aan stukken geslagen*’ [‘broken to pieces’]²⁴ on the beach, but there was no sign of the crew. As it is quite possible a number of the boat crew survived, they added to those who had been lost in the bush. With the weather worsening, the *Goede Hoop* was forced to sail away, leaving the 11 missing sailors to their fate.

It would be another two years before another search was mounted for the 68 survivors from the *Vergulde Draeck* and 11 sailors from the *Goede Hoop*. The *Waeckende Boey*, under Captain Volkersen, arrived in the area in February 1658. It seems that the crew found part of the wreck of the *Draeck* still above water, and on 26 February a shore party led by Upper-Steersman Abraham Leeman discovered ‘a number of pieces of planking had been put in a circle with their ends upwards.’²⁵

This appears to have been the abandoned campsite of the survivors from the *Vergulde Draeck*.²⁶ On 21 March another structure was found on the beach, ‘a deal plank 8 to 9 feet long [2.4-2.7m] and a foot wide [30cm] put upright in the earth and round it 12 to 13 struts of similar planks, also stuck in the sand’,²⁷ in the locality of the wreck site. One can only speculate, but it is quite possible, given that it seems to have been found to the north of the wreck of the *Vergulde Draeck*,²⁸ that it may also have been constructed from the wreckage of their ship by the 68 stranded crew and passengers, presumably as a sign to those they hoped would at some point come searching for them.

In a cruel twist of fate, only days later Leeman and thirteen others of his shore party found themselves in the same predicament as those for whom they had been searching. While the shore party was on one of its forays, the *Waeckende Boey* was forced away from the coast by wild weather. On 28 March it reappeared in the gathering dusk. The shore party, on the Green Islands just offshore south of Cervantes at the time, quickly lit a bonfire and the ship appeared to respond by firing one of its cannons. The shore party then lit another fire, in expectation of being re-united with their comrades. But then, inexplicably, the vessel set sail and was gone. Leeman and his men were devastated. However, rather than ending up as another group of unfortunates compelled to live out their days as permanent residents of a strange and forbidding land, Leeman and some of his shipmates managed to save themselves by undertaking of one of the most remarkable voyages in history (see Leeman vignette).²⁹

Little is known about the final unsuccessful search for the survivors from the *Vergulde Draeck* and *Goede Hoop* by the *Immenhoorn* in early 1659.³⁰

Since that time a number of objects and artefacts have been found, which may be associated with these two groups of exiles, hinting at their survival. The first of these was a spectacular 'incense urn', supposedly handed over to the New Norcia Mission in 1846 by some *Juat* people, who had found it at a well about 20 kilometres south of where the *Vergulde Draeck* was wrecked.³¹ The second were two curious 'Circles' or 'Rings of Stones' - one with a long radiating line, and these were seen in both 1875 and 1938 in very inaccessible country, 160 and 200 kilometres north of the *Vergulde Draeck* wreck site. These structures are thought to have possibly been constructed by the survivors from that ship.³² The original Indigenous population in those areas, the *Juat* and *Amangu*, do not appear to have traditionally constructed stone arrangements and they are unlike any other Aboriginal stone arrangements in south Western Australia. Furthermore, unlike most Aboriginal ceremonial sites, they are in quite inhospitable locations. It is thought that perhaps these structures were created to indicate that the survivors had been there, and the direction in which they intended to proceed.

In 1890 kangaroo shooters stumbled on a mast, 'about 40ft [12m]' long, 25 kilometres north of the wreck site, presumably more wreckage from the ship. Of greater significance was a large rusty iron pot of about 50 litres capacity, a couple of horn spoons, a copper shovel and two crescent-shaped hatchets which they found there as well.³³ These indicate that it may have been one of the survivors' campsites. An extremely weathered, crumbling skeleton found in 1931 in a small cave at Eagles Nest which showed signs of having been occupied, was another potentially significant find. This skeleton, along with a clump of coins, found in dunes to the south of the *Vergulde Draeck* wreck site at the same time, are presumed to have some relationship to the wreck or its aftermath.³⁴ Potentially more revealing was the reputed discovery of another coin on the banks of the Moore River, 65 kilometres inland, in 1957, although the circumstances are vague.³⁵

Around 54 years would pass before another mishap occurred. This happened in 1712, when the *Zuiddorp* was wrecked in devastating circumstances. The *Zuiddorp* had departed from the Cape of Good Hope on 22 April, with up to 286 people on board.³⁶ Of the 286 on board when the ships left the Netherlands, 112 died en-route to the Cape and another 22 were sick on arrival. The *Zuiddorp* waited at the Cape for the same 22 to be nursed back to health and replenished the numbers lost en-route from the local garrison.³⁷

Although the exact composition of the complement on board is not known, it appears that there was a mixture of nationalities, with Dutch making up perhaps only fifty percent of the total. The remainder came from other European nations, mainly Germans who were attracted by the economic possibilities for employment generated by the Golden Age. There were also a small number of passengers, and these probably included women and children.³⁸ However after leaving the Cape, the *Zuiddorp*, instead of arriving in Batavia, simply 'disappeared' and it would be another 215 years before any further sign of it was found.

The fate of the *Zuiddorp* and its passengers and crew first came to light in 1927. Wreckage and artefacts from the ship were allegedly found by stockman Tom Pepper on a cliff-face about 60 kilometres north of the Murchison River, although he may, in fact, have been directed there by members of the Drage family.³⁹ However it was not until 1959, that the identity of the wreck was confirmed by Dr Phillip Playford.⁴⁰ It appears that the *Zuiddorp* had struck the rocky platform at the base of the *Zuiddorp* Cliffs (580 km north of Perth), swung side-on and had come to rest against the same platform, eventually breaking up into three sections.⁴¹ The discovery of a considerable amount of material from the wreck on both the scree slope and at the top of the cliffs, established that a proportion of the ship's complement had managed to get off the stricken vessel and on to shore. This material included coins, nine 11 kilogram cannon breech-blocks, 27 kilograms of lead sheeting, large bottles, navigational instruments, the remains of chests and barrels, a brass dish, clay pipes, callipers, pins, writing slates, a pistol and musket balls.⁴² Two or possibly three campsites appear to have been established at the time in close proximity to the wreck site, and indicated, along with the ashes of a large fire beacon, that the survivors were present in the area for some time following their misfortune.⁴³

Exactly how many people survived the disaster is quite uncertain and estimates vary from 30 up to 180.⁴⁴ It is presumed that the collision with the cliffs occurred at night, as they are highly visible for a considerable distance out to sea in the daytime. The amount of material brought on to the cliff top indicates that there may not have been a large number of survivors. Conversely, the fact that objects such as the breech blocks and lead sheeting were brought ashore at all, suggests that they had time to retrieve non-essential items. This is consistent with a scenario of the wreck remaining accessible for some time, enabling most of the survivors to make it to the shore, with their initial efforts being directed to retrieving perishables

such as food and water. It should be noted that at least 87 per cent of the passengers and crew of the *Batavia* managed to survive the initial disaster, even though they were wrecked in the middle of the night in storms and were hundreds of metres from their nearest refuge.

What actually became of the survivors of the *Zuiddorp* after they left the wreck site, is a question that is yet to be answered. In 1869, a single Spanish coin, a *ducaton*, identical to those from the *Zuiddorp*, was given to Charles Gill a station manager at Shark Bay by a man named War-du-marrah. He seems to have found it at Woomerangee Hill, 40 kilometres north of the *Zuiddorp* wreck site.⁴⁵ In 1971, photographer Tony Bell claimed to have found a stone cross laid out on the ground, graves, fragments of green bottles and a 'roofless stone hut' to the north of the wreck site,⁴⁶ but it is difficult to link these to the survivors with any confidence. An inscribed brass tin, known as a 'Leyden Tobacco Tin', similar to those found at other wreck sites, was discovered at Wale Well, 55 kilometres north of the *Zuiddorp* wreck site in April 1990. It is thought to possibly have come from a survivor of that wreck,⁴⁷ but how it got there is uncertain. An unusual grave at that location, found at the same time as the tobacco tin,⁴⁸ could have some connection, but that too is uncertain.

OTHER POSSIBLE CASTAWAYS

While there were a number of well-documented incidents that led to passengers and crew from Dutch ships becoming marooned on the coast of Western Australia, there were other occurrences that may have swelled their numbers. For example, as they anchored in Broken Anchor Bay on the day the two mutineers were abandoned, Pelsaert observed smoke rising from the land and sent a yawl to investigate, 'to get dependable information about this place and the smoke'. This was not successful because, as he reported, 'the Blacks kept themselves hidden',⁴⁹ In actual fact Pelsaert was not just seeking contact with the local people, but he was hoping to relocate the five sailors lost in a boat near the Abrolhos Islands on around 13 October. They had set out to retrieve a barrel of vinegar from an island to the north of the wreck site, when a southerly gale blew up. This is a common occurrence in these waters at that time of year and the sailors and their boat were not seen again.⁵⁰ Pelsaert had sailed slowly up the coast for about six or seven hours on 15 and 16 November, in the hope of finding some sign of these men,⁵¹ before depositing the two mutineers and finally departing.

Intriguingly in January 1697 at 'Wittecarra Spring', a shore party from the '*de Vlamingh*' expedition encountered a hut 'made of clay with a roof sloping down two sides'.⁵² This was quite unlike the dome-shaped permanent shelters seen by Grey at Hutt River in 1839,⁵³ or the more temporary shelters of branches, bark or grass which were common in most other parts of Australia. Theoretically, the lost boat crew could have reached the coast, become stranded and subsequently built the hut in question - however without any supporting evidence, this must remain mere conjecture.

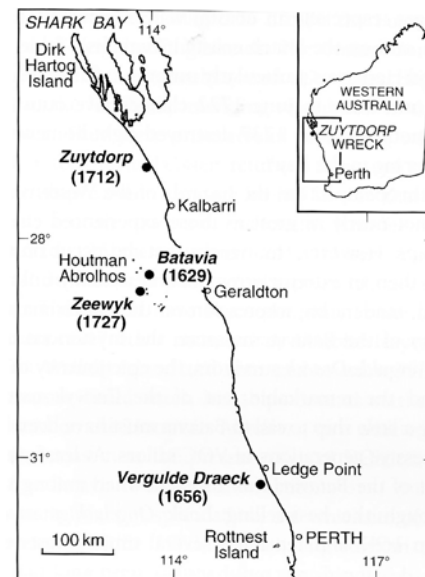


Figure 5
Map of Western Australian Dutch East India Company wreck sites.
Courtesy: Dr Phillip Playford.

Another group, which could be added to the list of mariners and passengers who ‘disappeared’ in the vicinity of the west coast of Western Australia during the 17th and 18th centuries, are 12 sailors from the *Zeewijk*. The *Zeewijk* foundered on Half-Moon Reef in the Pelsaert Group of the Abrolhos Islands on 9 June 1727. Over half of the ship’s complement perished before they found refuge on nearby Gun Island. After regrouping on 10 July, they sent 12 sailors, under the command of Upper-Steersman Pieter Langeweg, off in their longboat, to make for Batavia to get help.⁵⁴ Nothing further was ever heard of those sailors and their vessel, which may have come to grief further north on other islands or on the mainland coast. After waiting months for their salvation, the 88 remaining people realised that there must have been some mishap, built a new vessel called *Sloepie* from the remnants of the *Zeewijk*,⁵⁵ and successfully sailed back to Batavia.⁵⁶ Before leaving, they had abandoned two crew members found in a homosexual embrace on separate islands – to die.

Nothing has emerged since then to provide any further indication of the fate of the longboat crew. Part of a ship’s boom and a couple of planks erected on the beach in the Champion Bay area (Geraldton), were reported by several observers between 1830 and 1840,⁵⁷ and an upright plank was seen at the mouth of the Gascoyne River in 1851.⁵⁸ These could have some link with the missing men from the *Zeewijk*’s longboat, but there is really nothing definite to connect them to these objects. There remains the possibility that other seafaring folk, of whom we have no certain knowledge, also became stranded on the coast of Western Australia during this period.

Four Dutch ships, the *Zeelt* (1672), *Ridderschap van Holland* (1694), the *Fortuyn* (1724) and the *Aagtekerke* (1726), as well as an English ship, the *Whale* (1621), are now known to have vanished without trace following their departure from the Cape of Good Hope.⁵⁹ Where they went and what became of them and the people on board is a complete mystery. However, there does appear to be an as yet unidentified Dutch shipwreck, the remains of which are to be specifically located, situated just north of Busselton in the south west of Western Australia. Here, in 1846 Frank Gregory, a surveyor, and later an explorer of some note, reported in 1861 that he had come across:

..remains of a vessel of considerable tonnage ... in a shallow estuary near the Vasse Inlet ...which, from its appearance I should judged to have been wrecked two hundred years ago...⁶⁰

In the 19th century, a number of observers reported this wreck, which has come to be known as the ‘Deadwater Wreck’. In 1876 the ‘Receiver of Wrecks’, Worsley Clifton, who also claims to have also seen the same wreck in 1846,⁶¹ stated that it was ‘covered with water, sand and seaweed to the depth of about fourteen feet’, that it was ‘evidently ancient’ and ‘must have been a very large ship’. Clifton further noted that ‘two ancient coins’ and ‘about 70 lbs [32 kg] of quicksilver [mercury]’ had been found in the vicinity.⁶² By collating and consolidating all available information, it was concluded that the vessel in question had been relatively large, possibly 30 metres or more long, was of ‘considerable tonnage’ and had been built in the period between 1650 and

1750, being probably of Dutch origin.⁶³ It could possibly have been one of the five unaccounted-for ships.⁶⁴

Conclusion

In summary, it is an established fact that 73 individuals from Dutch ships were last seen alive on the shores of the coast of Western Australia between 1629 and 1656. Between 1629 and 1727, a further 25 individuals disappeared near the same shore (the boat crew from the *Goede Hoop*), or in close proximity to the coast (the boat crews from *Sardam* and *Zeewijk*). In addition at least 30, and possibly as many as 180 people are presumed to have survived the sinking of the *Zuytdorp*, with potential survivors from other wrecks also contributing to these numbers.

Background contestation

The lines of research about survivors of VOC shipwrecks along the Western Australian coast have been pioneered principally by Phillip Playford and Rupert Gerritsen (deceased 2013). As Gerritsen noted, 'by its nature such research invites controversy, but one worthy of the significance these 'first immigrants' have for Australian history'. The main difference between Playford's and Gerritsen's viewpoints, is the actual geographical location of where the two recalcitrants involved in the mutiny on the VOC flagship, the Batavia, were abandoned by its Skipper Frans Pelsaert. Playford's position is Witticarra Creek, whereas Rupert Gerritsen has opted for the Hutt River. The information in this chapter written by Rupert Gerritsen, presents the Hutt River perspective. Nonja Peters

Endnotes

- 1 Of course archaeological evidence and historical records show Melanesians from New Guinea, Torres Strait and islands to the east had been coming to Cape York to visit, trade or engage in conflict for at least 2-3,000 years.
- 2 See F Pelsaert, 'The Journals of Francisco Pelsaert', in H Drake-Brockman, comp. *Voyage to disaster*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1629/1963, pp. 105-254.
Of the 165 identified individuals on the *Batavia*, 27 (16%) were passengers. (Pelsaert, 1629, pp. 107-111.)
- 3 This reconstruction is based on R Gerritsen, 'The debate over where Australia's first European residents were marooned in 1629 — Part 1', *Hydrographic Journal*, vol. 126, 2007, pp. 20-25, and R Gerritsen, 'The debate over where Australia's first European residents were marooned in 1629 — Part 2', *Hydrographic Journal*, vol. 128-9, 2009a, pp. 35-41.
- 4 Pelsaert, 1629, p. 237.
- 5 *ibid.*
- 6 There are a number of detailed accounts of the sinking of the *Batavia* and the subsequent mutiny. See for example: H Drake-Brockman, *Voyage to disaster*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1963; H Edwards, *Islands of angry ghosts*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1973; M Dash, *Batavia's graveyard*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 2002. P FitzSimons, *Batavia*, Random House Australia, North Ryde, 2012.
- 7 Gerritsen, R, 'The *Batavia* Mutiny: Australia's first military conflict in 1629', *Sabretache: Journal and Proceedings of the Military Historical Society of Australia* vol. 1(4), 2009b, pp.5-10; Gerritsen, R, 'The first naval confrontations in Australian waters - in 1629?', *Journal of Australian Naval History* vol. 9(1), 2012, pp.100-119.
- 8 See R Gerritsen, *Australia's first criminal prosecutions in 1629*, Batavia Online Publishing, Canberra, 2011a, for an analysis of the trials from a legal perspective.
- 9 Pelsaert, 1629, pp. 222, 224-225; Gerritsen 2011a.
- 10 Pelsaert, 1629, p. 237.
- 11 A Van Dieman, C Vanderlijn, J Maetsuijker, J Shouten & S Sweerts, 'Instructions for Abel Jansen Tasman', in J Heeres, comp., *Abel Janszoon Tasman's Journal*, pp.147-154, Frederick Muller and Co, Amsterdam, 1898, p.150.

- Although Tasman mapped a considerable portion of the north and north-west coasts of Australia he never actually reached as far south as the location where the mutineers were abandoned.
- 12 'Instructions for Wouter Loos and Jan Pelgrom de By van Bemel, 16 November 1629', in Pelsaert, 1629, p. 230.
- 13 Grey, G, *A journal of two expedition in north-west and western Australia during the years 1837-39*, volume 2, T & W Boone, London, 1841, p.12
This was the first of numerous yam fields that existed at the time of British colonisation in the river valleys of the Geraldton region.
- 14 Grey, 1841, p.12.
- 15 <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/gregory-sir-augustus-charles-3663>.
- 16 Gregory, AC, 'Memorandum on the Aborigines of Australia' in HL Roth, 'On the Origin of Agriculture', *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 16, 1887, p.131.
Gregory had in fact first reported this the previous year: see AC Gregory, 'Inaugural address', *Proceedings of the Queensland Branch of the Geographical Society of Australasia*, vol. 1, 1886, p.23.
- 17 Grey, G, 1841, p.19.
- 18 Gerritsen, R, *Nhanda villages of the Victoria District, Western Australia*, Intellectual Property Publications, Canberra, 2002: Recent research indicates that this settlement, made up of permanent dome-shaped dwellings capable of accommodating ten people, had an estimated population of 290.
- 19 'Resolution of the Council for the Indies, 7 June 1656', Lous Zuiderbaan, 'Part One: Historical background', in Jeremy N. Green (comp. & ed.) *The Loss of the Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie Jacht VERGULDE DRAECK, Western Australia 1656*, pp.48-50, Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, Oxford, 1977, p.48
- 20 'Letter from Governor-General and Council to the Council (Chamber of Amsterdam) of the VOC, 4 December 1656', in J Henderson, *Marooned*, St George Books, Perth, 1985, p.55.
- 21 'Letter 4 December 1656'.
- 22 ibid
- 23 'Sailing Orders for 'Emeloordt' and 'Waeckende Boey', 31 December 1657', in Zuiderbaan 1977. p.50.
- 24 Stapel, F. W. 1943 *De oostindische compagnie en Australie*, Amsterdam: P. N. Kampen & Zoon, p.98.
- 25 'Day Register by Samuel Volkersen of *Waeckende Boey* — 26 February 1658', in Henderson, 1985, p.96
- 26 Gerritsen, R, *Selected transcriptions, translations, and collation of information for a textual analysis relating to material evidence from the Vergulde Draeck and the 68 missing crew and passengers from that vessel, reportedly found on the coast of Western Australia in the period 1656 – 1658*, Batavia Online Publishing, Canberra, 2011b.
- 27 Leeman, A, 'Journaal of te dag register van mijne voyagie gedaan met de fluyt de "Waeckende Boey" in compe van de fluyt "Emeloort" van Bata naer 't Suylant, om nae 't schip "den Vergulden Draeck", 1656 aldaar verongeluckt, te vernemen', Battye Library MS PR 8818/GIL/4 - 0/77 (<http://www.museum.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/No-273-Leemans-Journal.pdf>)
- 21 March 1658.
- 28 See Gerritsen, 2011b, pp.55-56.
- 29 For a translation of Leeman's journal see C de Heer, 'My shield and my faith'. *Westerly* No.1 April, 1963, pp.33-46. For a fuller account of his remarkable journey, see Henderson, 1985.
- 30 The *Immenhorn* was sent early in 1659, see PA Leupe, *De reizen der Nederlanders naar het Zuidland of Nieuw-Holland, en de 17th and 18th eeuw*, G. Hulst van Keulen, Amsterdam, pp.146-147.
- 31 Gerritsen R, *And their ghosts may be heard*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, South Fremantle, 1994, pp.49-50.
- 32 ibid, pp. 237-243; Gerritsen R, 'Marooned mariners and mudmaps: The search for the Ring of Stones', *The Globe* vol. 64, 2010, pp.17-25.
- 33 Gerritsen, R, 1994, p.52; p.35.
- 34 ibid, pp. 53-54.
The sites in this area have been subject to ongoing investigation, see G Flowers, *Gilt Dragon terrestrial investigations: Skeleton and coin sites, April 2001*. Maritime Archaeology Association of Western Australia, Innaloo, 2001; Gerritsen, 2010, pp.35, 54-56.
- 35 Wilson, Stan, 1964, 'The significance of coins in the identification of old Dutch wrecks on the West Australian coast', *Numismatic Circular* 72(9):193; *The Independent: Magazine*, 15 June 1969, p.3; Gerritsen, 1994, p.293n31.
- 36 Playford, PE, 'Wreck of the Zuytdorp on the Western Australian coast in 1712', *Journal and Proceedings of the Western Australian Historical Society* vol. 5(5), 1959, pp.5-41, p.36; PE Playford, *Carpet of silver: the wreck of the Zuytdorp*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1996, p.61, 200.

- 37 VOC Correspondence file Zuiddorp 'Heeren Resoluties van de Caap 1712', Nationaal Archief, The Hague
- 38 Playford, PE, 1996, pp.41-43. Other nationalities may have included Germans, Norwegians, Swiss, Latvians, Swedes, Indians and Belgians.
- 39 There has been considerable debate about who first found the wreck in modern times. See Playford, 1996, pp.82-100; G Henderson, *Unfinished voyages: Western Australian shipwrecks 1622 - 1850*, University of Western Australia Press, Crawley, 2007, pp.47-48.
- 40 Playford, 1959.
- 41 Playford, 1996, pp.115, 201-203.
- 42 Playford, 1959, pp.28-35; Gerritsen, 1994, pp.36-37; Playford, 1996, pp.82-84, 120-27.
- 43 Playford, 1996, pp.120-24.
- 44 Gerritsen, 1994, pp.37-38 (40-180 survivors); Playford, 1996, pp.203 (30 survivors).
- 45 *Inquirer and Commercial News*, 12 May 1869, p.12; Playford, 1959, pp.38-39.
- 46 *The Sunday Times*, 23 May 1971, p.4. But see Henderson, 2007, p.48.
- 47 Playford, 1996, pp.214-216.
- 48 *The West Australian*, 8 September 1990, p.6.
- 49 Pelsaert, 1629, p.237.
- 50 *ibid*, pp.215-216.
They were last seen on 13 October about 9 kilometres NNE of the Wallabi Group.
- 51 Pelsaert, 1629, pp.234, 236-237.
- 52 N Witsen, 'Nicolas Witsen's account of de Vlamingh's voyage', in G Schilder, (ed.) *Voyage to the Great South Land: Willem de Vlamingh 1696-1697*, pp.216-221, Royal Australian Historical Society, Sydney, 1985, p.218.
- 53 Gerritsen R, 2002, pp.13-15.
- 54 Edwards, H, *The wreck on the Half-Moon Reef*, Robert Hale and Co, London, 1971. ; Henderson, 2007, pp.63-71.
- 55 As far as is known the *Sloepie* was the first European vessel built in Australia.
- 56 Edwards, H, 1971, pp.86-168; C Ingelman-Sundberg, *Relics from the Dutch East Indiaman 'Zeewijk' foundered in 1727*, Western Australian Museum, Perth, 1977, pp.7-10; Gerritsen, 1994, pp.38-39.
- 57 Preston, Lt W, 'Expedition to explore to the northward of Fremantle Nov. 23rd 1830', in *Exploration diaries*, vol. 1, 1830, p. 224; *Perth Gazette*, 6 December, 1834, pp. 402-3; Commander Dring, 'Extract from the journal of HMC government schooner *Champion* on a voyage from Swan River to the mouth of the Hutt', in *Exploration diaries*, vol. 3, 1840, p. 632; *Perth Gazette*, 8 February 1840, p.24.
- 58 Helpman, F, 'Extracts from a report of a voyage to Sharks Bay & Exmouth Gulf in colonial schooner *Champion*: April 7, 1851', in *Exploration diaries*, vol. 4, 1851, p.268.
- 59 Henderson, J, *Phantoms of the Tryall: Australia's first shipwreck 1622*, St George Books, Perth, 1993, p.28; Henderson, 2007, pp.14.41-45, 53-54, 57-63, 69.
- 60 Gregory, FT, 'On the geology of a part of Western Australia', *Quarterly Journal of the Geological Society of London*, vol. 17, 1861, pp. 475-483.
ibid, p.482.
- 61 It seems Clifton, a teenager at the time, had accompanied Resident Magistrate of Bunbury, George Eliot, on an inspection of the wreck.
- 62 'W Clifton to Colonial Secretary 25, 29 April 1876', quoted in R Gerritsen, *An historical analysis of wrecks in the vicinity of the Deadwater, Wonnerup, Western Australia*, Western Australian Maritime Museum, Department of Maritime Archaeology, Report No. 97, Fremantle, 1995; *ibid*, p.49; Alfred Burt, surveyor, and later Registrar of Titles and Deeds, saw the wreck in 1876 and stated it had 'a high stern built in an olden style' (DC Cowan, 'Mystery ship of the south west', *Western Mail*, 19 December 1929, p.7).
- 63 Gerritsen, R, 1995, pp.13-32; R Gerritsen, 'The mystery of the Deadwater Wreck', *International Hydrographic Review*, vol. 9 no.2, 2008b, pp.8-18.
- 64 Henderson (2007, pp.82-88) takes a different view regarding this wreck, arguing that it is the wreck of the *Geographe's* chaloupe [longboat], lost in the same area on 6 June 1801.

THE REMARKABLE VOYAGE OF ABRAHAM LEEMAN IN 1658

Rupert Gerritsen

A 1977 article by Tyler and Ross¹ on Leeman noted:

Few coasts in the world can be more inhospitable than the western coast of Australia. Festooned with off-shore reefs, arid, with no natural all-weather anchor-ages for well over eight hundred miles, subject to on-shore winds from several points of the compass for the greater part of the year, the European nations avoided close contact for as long as political considerations allowed them. Those shipmasters who encountered the coast did so by accident, largely owing to their inability to calculate longitude sufficiently accurately, and this factor was largely responsible for the loss ...in 1656, of the wreck of the armed merchant-man *Vergulde Draeck* on an off-shore reef about five miles SSW of what is now known as Ledge Point (p.38).

The *Vergulde Draeck* (Gilt Dragon) sailed from Texel bound for Batavia (Jakarta), under Pieter Albertsz, carrying trade goods and eight chests of silver to the value of 78,6000 guilders. On 28 April 1656 the Gilt Dragon was wrecked just south of Ledge Point about 150 kilometres north of modern day Perth. Seventy five of the 193 aboard made it to shore. A small boat was sent with the Understeersman and six others to Batavia, (now Jakarta), arriving 40 days later. Upon arrival there, they reported that as they sailed away, they saw the other survivors were trying to refloat a larger boat that had capsized in the surf while landing. Two vessels were sent south in search, but in the difficult conditions failed to sight either the wreckage or the survivors. Eleven men and a boat were also lost during the same search. In January 1658 two more ships were sent out to investigate further but they also proved unsuccessful. In searching for any survivors, the yacht *Goede Hoop* and the *Waeckende Boey* lost their long boats and 10 men. Another longboat commanded by Abraham Leeman also disappeared, arriving in Batavia nearly six months later. This is his story.

Abraham Leeman was on the ship the *Waeckende Boey*, one of the Dutch East India Company vessels sent in January 1658 to look for survivors of the Gilt Dragon. However, when the weather changed it had set sail for Batavia, leaving Abraham Leeman, 13 more men and a longboat all stranded on the WA shore.

From dawn the following morning, Leeman and the men pursued the *Waeckende Boey* in a longboat in vain, for most of the day. In his journal Leeman noted that on returning to land, he ‘climbed onto rocks and looked out to sea, praying to God for help and succour with weeping eyes, not

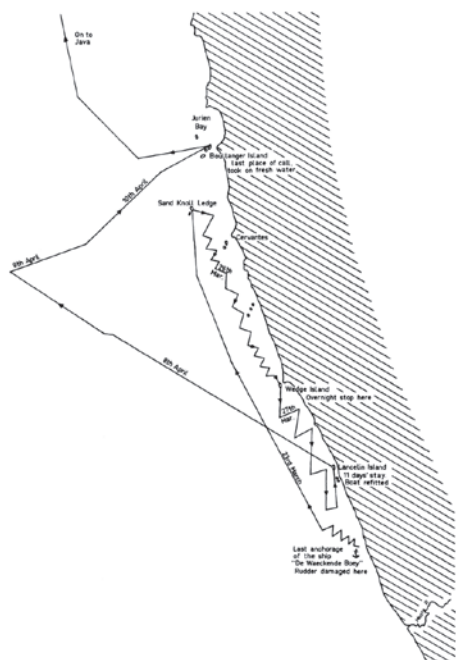


Figure 1
Leeman's travels to Batavia diagram from
Tyler and Ross, Westerley, No.1,
March, 1977, p.34.

knowing what he should do'.² Two days later, realising that Volkersen would not return, they began preparations to sail to Batavia. Seals were killed, the meat was roasted and dried and the skins were used to raise the sides of the boat. They dug another well in the sand which yielded better water than the first, its brackish water having previously made them all feel ill. On 8 April, the 14 men set sail in a badly leaking boat, carrying 75 litres of precious water. Leeman, relying on his memory, had carved a map in the stern of the boat, recording the little information that was known at the time about that part of the 'Southland'.

With fitful breezes they made their way north. They went ashore on Middle Island in the Southern Group of the Abrolhos Islands, 70 kilometres almost directly west of Geraldton, where they managed to find more water and replenish their supply. Then onward past the Zuytdorp Cliffs and Point Inscription at the tip of Dirk Hartog Island – the most westerly point of Australia. They continued heading for Java, constantly baling out water, terrible thirst crushing their strength; if 'a drop was spilt we regretted this extremely.'³ Blows were exchanged as they fought, even over the drinking of their own urine. On 19 April the first man died, 'constantly calling out for water but we could not, nor dared we, help him,' wrote Leeman.

On the eighteenth day at sea, 26 April, two more men died of thirst. Yet their torment continued further and two days later they were down to their last ration. Leeman promised a noggin of water to the first man to sight land. In the early afternoon the quaking voice of the lookout called, 'Land!'⁴ It was Java. They had come over 2000 kilometres across open ocean and had reached the eastern end of Java. But they still had to get to shore, and Batavia was still 800 kilometres away. Leeman instructed seven of the remaining crew to swim ashore to get water, so that they could continue their voyage in the boat. Once ashore, however, they frantically gathered coconuts, completely ignoring the men remaining in the boat. Frustrated, Leeman then put ashore himself, but could not find the deserters. After replenishing with water and coconuts, he and the three remaining crew attempted to put to sea again, only to have the boat wrecked by the surf and a monsoonal storm. They made it back to shore, half-drowned, ate palm shoots and in the face of another storm 'crept into the sand together and remained lying like this until the next day.'⁵

After spending some time recovering, they set off to walk to Batavia. For five weeks, the four men, living merely on coconuts, were forced to struggle along the coast, much of it being rugged, jungle-covered mountains and cliffs. They came across a small deserted hamlet, where a tiger threatened them. Then they found two unattended '*proas*' [fishing boats], but were

unable to launch them as the sea was too rough. Shortly afterwards, some Javanese appeared in another *proa* and Leeman managed to communicate to them about their plight. These men took Leeman and his crew to their house and fed the emaciated castaways with bananas, coconuts, rice and maize. While Leeman and his companions rested, the local chief was consulted and they were told they would be taken to Batavia.

Firstly they were taken to a local village, then the town of Calamprit, where they were greeted by the local chief and placed under guard. Three weeks later they were taken to the city of Mataram and were interrogated by Prince Tommagon Pati for two weeks. Once satisfied with their story, the Prince's men took them to a house to wait for a visitor. Another week passed when finally Michiel Zeeburgh appeared. It seemed they were being held for ransom. Lengthy negotiations took place and finally on 23 September, they were reunited with their countrymen at Japara.

Their incredible adventure had come to an end, they had overcome some of the greatest perils any human had ever faced, but they had made it home! Leeman wrote, 'Our joy was so great as if we were going to Heaven'.⁶ It was indeed a remarkable test of courage and endurance. This was acknowledged when on 16 June 1961, the area of the Snag Island settlement, north of Jurien Bay, was officially gazetted as the town of Leeman.⁷

Endnotes

- 1 Editor N. Peters quoting, Phillip Tyler and Keith Ross, 'Abraham Leeman –Castaway', in *Westerly* 1 March 1977, pp.34-60.
- 2 Leeman, 29 March, 1658.
- 3 Leeman, ca. 15 April, 1658.
- 4 Leeman, 28 April, 1658.
- 5 Leeman, 30 April, 1658.
- 6 Leeman, ca. 23 September 1658.
In the aftermath of the miraculous survival of Abraham Leeman and his crewmates, the Council of the Indies of the Dutch East India Company reported that there had been a mishap with the boat of the *Waeckende Boey*, and that Volkersen had left 'writing off the same too thoughtlessly, as has become apparent since.' An examination of the Log showed Volkersen had indeed tried to cover up the fact that he had abandoned the boat and its crew. But Volkersen was never punished, he died several weeks before the Javanese prince released Leeman and his comrades.
- 7 Tyler and Ross 1977, p.40; Editors' note: Leeman's main claim to fame lies in the fact that he is the first European to have left a detailed account of his struggles in one of the most treacherous stretches of shoalwaters known, the four-mile-wide belt stretching nearly one hundred and eighty miles between what are now Jurien Bay and Trigg Island on the Western Australian coast.

'Figure 2 (opposite)

This painting of the houses in Delft, in the area known as 'The Little Street', by Johannes Vermeer, ca. 1658, illustrates the Holland the VOC crews and passengers left behind.
Courtesy: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

