

PRESS RELEASE

On 19 January a team of Australian shipwreck archaeologists will be leaving Perth for Australia's Indian Ocean territories of Christmas Island and the Cocos Keeling Islands, beginning a quest – the 'Closing in on the *Fortuyn* Project' – to locate a number of missing Dutch spice trade ships of the 18th century.

Project leader Graeme Henderson, former Director of the Western Australian Maritime Museum says 'The fate of the *Fortuyn* has previously been considered unknowable, but a reassessment of the archives has produced realistic search targets'. Research undertaken by Australian and Dutch archaeologists over the past several years started with British and French documents, indicating that a Dutch ship anchored at Christmas Island and ran ashore at night. Further research by Dutch collaborator Pablo Boorsma revealed that in April 1724 the skipper of the outgoing Dutch ship *Graveland* found floating wreckage from the missing *Fortuyn* in the latitude of the Cocos and the longitude of Christmas Island.

The 800-ton *Fortuyn* was built in 1723, with a length of 145 feet, for the Amsterdam chamber of the Dutch East India Company. Under the command of skipper Pieter Westrik, with a crew of 225, and armed with 36 cannon and 8 swivel guns, it departed Texel on its maiden voyage on 27 September 1723. It carried 200,000 guilders in valuables, consisting of silver bars and silver coins. The *Fortuyn* sailed in company with the East Indiamen *Hogenes* and *Graveland*, bound for Batavia (now Jakarta) via the Cape of Good Hope. After a fast and healthy passage of 97 days the *Fortuyn* anchored in Table Bay on 2 January 1724, reporting just one man dead and three sick. The *Fortuyn* took in some extra rations and left the Cape for Batavia on 18 January but was wrecked *en route*.

Skippers of Dutch East India Company ships sailing eastward across the Indian Ocean to Batavia during the 18th century were given instructions about their route. Between October and March they had to sail 700 miles eastwards to St Paul and Amsterdam Islands and then northeast, to Sunda Strait. On this course many would pass between the Cocos Islands and Christmas Island.

Team members Graeme Henderson from Perth, Andrew Viduka from Canberra, Alex Moss from Adelaide and James Parkinson from Melbourne will conduct magnetometer surveys along targeted coastlines seeking iron objects such as cannon and anchors from the outgoing Dutch ships *Fortuyn* and *Aagtekerke*, and several missing homeward bound vessels.

The Closing in on the *Fortuyn* Project is one of the activities commemorating 400 years since Dirk Hartog's 1616 First Landing in Western Australia. The project is sponsored by the Maritime Program of the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Canberra, and the Silentworld Foundation.

Further information can be obtained from Graeme Henderson on ph 0893396605, Fortuyn Project on Facebook, and email ghendo47@gmail.com.



Kingdom of the Netherlands