

## Shark Bay's Early Explorers

... and how Shark Bay got its name!

Shark Bay has a unique and intriguing cultural history, particularly its association with early European landings, explorations and scientific investigations.

The first recorded European to set foot in Western Australia was the Dutch Captain Dirk Hartog. Sailing the *Eendracht* east from the Cape of Good Hope to Java to trade in spices and other goods, he landed en route at Shark Bay on 25<sup>th</sup> October 1616. To record his visit for posterity, Hartog and his crew nailed an engraved pewter plate to a wooden post erected at the landing site, which is now known as Cape Inscription on Dirk Hartog Island. Unimpressed by the barren and dry land, he departed two days later.

Dirk Hartog's landing site was revisited in 1697 by William de Vlamingh on the Dutch ship *Geelvinck*, which was searching for survivors of a missing ship. De Vlamingh recognised the historic value of Hartog's plate and aiming to preserve its antiquity delivered it to Dutch authorities in Batavia (Jakarta). It was then returned to Holland. Before leaving Shark Bay, de Vlamingh emulated his predecessor and erected another memorial plaque at the same location.

On a voyage of discovery, William Dampier arrived here on 17<sup>th</sup> August 1699 aboard the HMS *Roebuck*. He anchored his ship between Dirk Hartog Island and Peron Peninsula and noticed the abundance of sharks at this location. It was Dampier who named the area "Sharks Bay" and he also became the first Englishman to walk on Australian soil.

Dampier made extensive observations of the plants, animals and geography of the area. He was the first to make botanical collections in Australia and the genus *Dampiera* – a genus of blue flowering plants that occur extensively in Western Australia – was named in his honour. He also wrote descriptions of the animals he encountered including the first description of a kangaroo. The HMS *Roebuck* sank in the Atlantic Ocean en route home to England, but Dampier managed to salvage his journals and some specimens from which he wrote 'A Voyage to New Holland'.

In 1772, two years after Captain Cook landed at Botany Bay and 16 years before the First Fleet arrived, French explorer Francois de St Alouarn claimed Australia for France at Cape Inscription. To support this claim, two French coins and a parchment were buried in a bottle on Dirk Hartog Island.

The French naval vessels *Geographe* and *Naturaliste*, on a scientific expedition led by Nicolas Baudin, arrived in Shark Bay first in 1801 and then again in 1803. The expedition spent 70 days in Shark Bay and during this time made discoveries that contributed significantly to the scientific knowledge of the area and the whole of Australia. They also gave names to many geographical features in the bay.

In 1801 a party from the *Naturaliste*, commanded by Captain Emmanuel Hamelin landed at Cape Inscription and discovered de Vlamingh's plate half buried in the sand. Hamelin had the plate re-affixed to another post and erected where it had been found. Hamelin also had a plate erected here to commemorate Baudin's expedition.

In 1818 Louis de Freycinet, a French explorer who was a member of Baudin's expedition, returned to Shark Bay on the *Uranie* as part of a world scientific voyage. On board was his wife Rose who had stowed away to join her husband on the voyage. Her journal records show that de Vlamingh's plate was found with some difficulty and delivered to France for safe keeping. Whether Hamelin's plate was also removed at this time is not certain.

Members of the *Uranie* expedition established a temporary camp at Cape Lesueur on Peron Peninsula. On his departure, Freycinet left a number of gifts on the shore in the hope that they would be discovered by and of use to the Aborigines. These items included looking glasses, scissors, iron hoops and knives.

While surveying the coast in 1821-22, Phillip Parker King searched in vain for the plates, but found only Hamelin's post, into which he inscribed his name. Dirk Hartog's plate is now in Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum. De Vlamingh's plate and the post King inscribed are in the Western Australian Maritime Museum in Perth.

Captain Henry Mangles Denham charted the Bay's waters in 1858. Captain Denham had the words "*Denham; Herald 1858*" chipped into a 20 metre high limestone cliff at Eagle Bluff. The section of the rock bearing this inscription is now in Denham's Pioneer Park.



Dirk Hartog's plate  
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Vlamingh's plate  
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Captain Henry Mangles Denham  
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