

ZEEWIJK

The history of the *Zeewijk* tells a fascinating story of survival and perseverance in times of extreme hardship.

The *Zeewijk* had left the port of Flushing, Holland, on the 7th of November 1726 with 212 people on board. Its cargo consisted of ten chests of coins and building supplies. Like VOC-ship the *Batavia*, the *Zeewijk* was on her maiden voyage to Batavia when she struck reef in the Houtman Abrolhos on 9th June 1727.

Of all the VOC-ships lost off the Western Australian coast, the men on the *Zeewijk* fared the best after crashing onto a reef on the 9th of June 1727. Although the vessel was badly damaged it did not break up, unlike the other ships. This enabled the men to access its cargo of provisions.

The crew found refuge on an island (today's Gun Island) and sent a number of men to Batavia in the *Zeewijk's* longboat. Regrettably, they disappeared forever, leaving 88 survivors behind.

While the provisions of the wreck lasted, the remaining survivors managed over the subsequent four months to construct a small sailing vessel named *Sloepie*. After nine months, they were able to depart and successfully made their way back to Batavia on 30 April 1728.

Today the wreck of the *Zeewijk* lies in heavy surf, breakers and strong currents four kilometres off the Western Australian coast. Its wreckage lies scattered along Half Moon Reef. Relics from survivor camps were discovered as early as 1840, but it was not until 1968 that the wreck site was finally identified.

Between 1974 and 1977 the Western Australian Museum conducted land and underwater surveys and excavations. Artefacts recovered from the *Zeewijk* include pieces of rigging, cannons, kegs of nails, wine glasses and ceramics. Artefacts found at the land site include glass, bone, ceramics and metal objects.



Figure 1: Tumbler, glass, with application; Figure 2: Onion bottle, wine. © CIE



Figure: Glass, tumbler. © CIE



Figure: Weight © CIE



Figure: Artefacts found in land sites. © WAMM