Dutch Links to Border

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Four hundred years ago the Eendracht, skippered by Dirk Hartog, became the second documented European ship to reach Australia. Hartog's arrival at what we now know as Cape Inscription on Dirk Hartog Island, was preceded in 1606 by another Dutch ship, the Dufken, skippered by Willem Janszoon.

These maritime arrivals, to what became known as New Holland, were the first of a number made in the 17th and 18th centuries by VOC (Dutch East India Co) ships.

The visits of Janszoon and Hartog comprise the first documented European arrivals in Australia, and the first of three major passages by the Dutch to Australia.

The Dirk Hartog pewter plate. The plate was removed from Dirk Hartog Island in 1697 by another Dutch mariner.

As a record of his visit, Dirk Hartog inscribed a pewter plate with the name of his ship, his name, the name of three crew members, dates of arrival and departure and their destination. The plate was nailed to a post and placed upright in a fissure on the cliff top at Cape Inscription. In 1697, another Dutch sailor, Captain Willem de Vlamingh, came to Dirk Hartog Island. His upper-steersman discovered Hartog's plate and took it on board the Geelvinck, which sailed on to Batavia, where Vlamingh presented it to the VOC governor general. The Hartog plate is now in Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, but is on display at the Maritime Museum of Western Australia and next year at the Australian National Maritime Museum in Sydney as part of the 400th anniversary.

The second major Dutch passage to Australia comprises aeroplane arrivals, designed to test the feasibility of establishing air services to Australia. The first such flight was that of the Fokker tri-motor F VIIa-3m Abel Tasman, which departed Batavia on May 12, 1931, and reached Melbourne on May 19, 1931. It was testing the viability of an airmail service to Australia.

The second flight of the second major Dutch passage to Australia was the flight of the KLM Royal Dutch Airlines Douglas DC-2 Uiver, which made its famous emergency landing on the Albury Racecourse at 1.17am on October 24, 1934. It was testing the viability of an airline passenger service to Australia and was the first commercial passenger flight of an all-metal aircraft from Europe.

A third flight of significance was the flight departing Batavia on July 3, 1938, and arriving at Sydney on July 5, 1938, of a KNILM Lockheed 14-WF62 Super Electra. It was this flight that established KNILM as the second airline corporation, and the first foreign airline corporation, to be permitted to establish a regular air service into Australia.

The third major Dutch passage to Australia was the post-war emigration of the Dutch to Australia, mainly in the 1950s and 1960s.

Thousands of Dutch left the economic chaos of Europe that came in the aftermath of World War II. Some 30,000 of them stayed for an induction period at the refugee and assisted migrant centre at Bonegilla. Many migrants and their descendants continue to live in the Albury-Wodonga district. Curiously, Albury-Wodonga has been central to two of these three major Dutch passages to Australia.