

# INTERIM REPORT ON 'HAARLEM' (1647) TEST EXCAVATIONS

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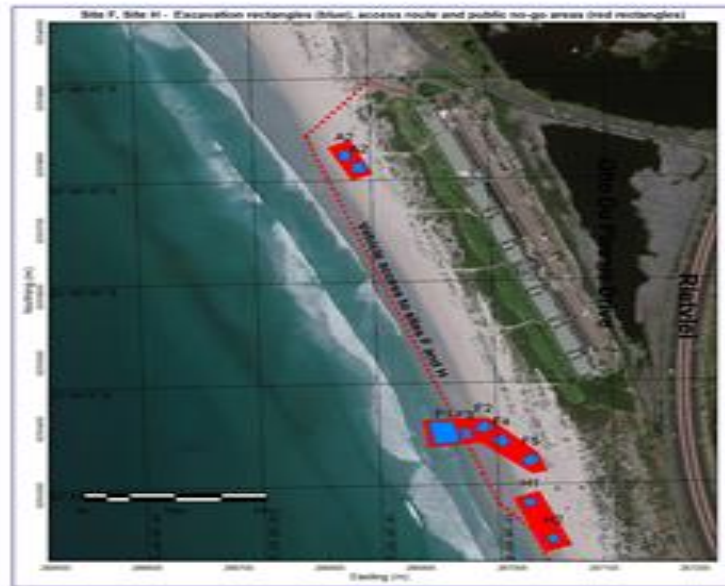


On Sunday 25 March 1647, shortly after five o'clock in the afternoon, the United Dutch East India Company (VOC) ship *Haarlem* wrecked in Table Bay. The events that followed had far-reaching consequences for the history of South Africa. 58 of the crew were repatriated by accompanying ships soon after the incident, but 62 men were left behind to try and salvage as much of the cargo as was possible. They found refuge in a makeshift camp, Fort *Zandenburch*, where they lived for about one year. During their stay, the men from *Haarlem* came into contact with indigenous people. Although initially marked by apprehension and reservation, these contacts improved after some time. This led to regular bartering, visits to each other's abodes, basic exchange of language and appreciation of each other's cultures. Upon returning to the Netherlands, the men reported favourably of their experiences. As a result, VOC management decided to establish a much-needed stopover for their ships. This station, that became known as the 'Tavern of the Seas', later developed into the city of Cape Town. The wrecking of *Haarlem* can thus be regarded as the catalyst that created one of the roots of current multiracial and multicultural South African society.

Since 1989, a research project is underway to search for the shipwreck and survivor camp. This involves archival work, geological and geophysical surveys, as well as archaeological test excavations. The objective is to locate both the shipwreck and its associated survivor camp and, once found, to excavate these historical sites according to the highest achievable scientific standards. Permission for the project has been obtained from the relevant authorities, including the City of Cape Town, the Department of Customs and Excise, the Western Cape Government's Environmental Affairs and Development Planning Department, Heritage Western Cape, the South African Heritage Resources Agency and Iziko Museums. The project is entirely supported by sponsors and volunteers. This interim report provides a brief overview of work undertaken to date, with an emphasis on recent archaeological field work. This has resulted in the location of a site that, based on the currently available evidence, may well contain the wreck of *Haarlem*. This site is situated in the inter-tidal zone at a depth of about 3 to 4 metres below the beach surface, just to the south-west of the Dolphin Beach Hotel in Table View.



Based on archival, geographical and geological data, an area between Milnerton and Table View was demarcated as the most likely location where the *Haarlem* foundered. Geophysical surveys that were undertaken in 2017 and 2018 revealed a number of magnetic anomalies that were checked by test excavations. In area A1-A2 an historical wreck was located, but this proved to be of a later date. Most significant artefacts were found in area's F1-F5 and H1-H2, just west-southwest of the Dolphin Beach Hotel in Table View. Although the results of material analyses are still outstanding, the items are very similar to those expected on a VOC wreck like *Haarlem*.



This iron bolt was found in F1, about 3-4 metres underneath the intertidal beach. The bolt broke off during recovery with a mechanical excavator and was obviously attached to a substantial piece of wooden structure. Material analyses carried out by Wits University in Johannesburg will hopefully reveal the origin of the iron.





The metal composite plate to the right consists of a layer of copper, backed by a layer of lead. Composite layers of lead and copper were used to protect the stem post (bow section) as well as the stern post (aft section) and rudder of VOC ships. This plate was also excavated from section F1 and may possibly indicate either the front or back section of the wreck.



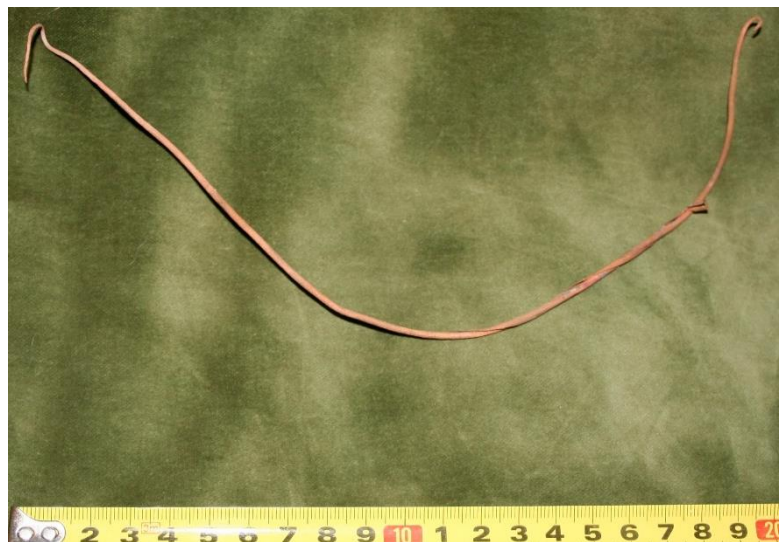
Lead patches in various sizes were applied to patch leaks in the hull or to render certain sections of the ship watertight.



Brass and copper nails, such as the one on the left, were used in ship's construction. The fact that considerable quantities of lead patches and nails were found in sections F1-3 may indicate the presence of a substantial section of the hull of the vessel.



This, as yet unidentified object was found in Section F2, opposite Sections F1-3 where a wreck is suspected. Details have been recorded and these seem to point to a bilge pump. The information was forwarded to international research institutes, including the Institute for Nautical Archaeology at Texas A & M University. As with the material analyses of the lead and copper, more information is expected shortly.



This object is most likely a necklace and is made from a thin rod of hand-drawn copper. It has been recorded that the men from *Haarlem* bartered copper with indigenous people. The journals of the first commander at the Cape, Jan van Riebeeck (1652-1662), are full of references to this practise and state that locals fashioned jewellery from copper obtained in lieu of livestock. This seemingly inconspicuous object thus symbolises interaction between indigenes and those from overseas.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The shipwreck of *Haarlem* in Table Bay in 1647 was an event that had far-reaching consequences for South Africa. The City of Cape Town as we know it today, as well as current multi-cultural and multi-racial South African society, were in part a direct result of his incident. Very few shipping disasters world-wide had ever such an impact on the history of a whole nation. It is evident that this historic event thus needs to be studied in more detail, as it has been ignored for too long.

The wrecking of *Haarlem* is also tightly knit to Western European history. The Dutch 'connection' is obvious, as *Haarlem* was a vessel that operated under the mightiest trading organisation—in fact the first multinational corporation—that the world had ever seen. This company, the VOC, also employed many Germans, Scandinavians, British, French and other Europeans and had commercial interests in these respective countries.

Since 1989, a research project is being undertaken that aims to collect, study and interpret as much information on the shipwreck and its aftermath as possible. A wealth of historic information has been traced since. Relatively recent work focusses on test excavations in an area where the wreck of *Haarlem* and an associated survivor camp are expected. Results of test excavations to date are promising, and it is reasonable to assume that conclusive evidence may be uncovered within a matter of weeks.

The *Haarlem* Project has also other practical results. A number of volunteers has been provided with basic field work training, and these people play a most important role in current test excavations. Visits to schools in Cape Town's townships provide an opportunity to inform young people about aspects of their history that may not be apparent. The same can be said of site visits by officials and members of the public, such as local Capetonians, tourist guides and overseas visitors. Public information is also being stimulated by academic and popular publications, radio- and television programmes and public lectures. These various aspects underline the public information and educational role that forms an intrinsic part of the *Haarlem* Project.

Funding for the project to date has been realised through private means and limited sponsorships. No public money or government funding has been spent so far. It is hoped that soon more support can be realised. This will allow for the continuation of the *Haarlem* Project, as its importance on both a national as well as an international level is evident.

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#### RADIO AND TELEVISION EXPOSURE

2015 SAFM

2015 [https://soundcloud.com/primediabroadcasting/haarlem-the-real-history?utm\\_source=soundcloud&utm\\_campaign=share&utm\\_medium=email](https://soundcloud.com/primediabroadcasting/haarlem-the-real-history?utm_source=soundcloud&utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=email)

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