

THE BATAVIA, RE-VISITED

Brian Lemin.

For those of you who have not "visited" the Batavia for the first time as yet, you should plan to read Rosemary Shepherd's article in OI DFA 1994/1, where she not only retells the story of the Batavia, but more importantly reconstructs the lace found on this important vessel.

INTRODUCTION

A wonderful reconstruction of the vessel Batavia, which was wrecked off the West coast of Australia in 1629, is visiting Sydney for the Olympic year 2000, and being brought up as a seafaring man and lately a bobbin man, I wanted to see it.



The Batavia in Darling Harbour. Sydney.

She belonged to the Dutch East India Company and was designed as a "return" ship. That is it was made to bring back spices, tea and other valuable products from the East Indies. The original was wrecked in 1629 some 60 kms. off the west coast of Australia, and since its discovery in 1963 it has been subject to maritime archaeological investigation and retrieval. Amongst the finds were some fragments of lace and two lace bobbins. Hence an article on it in this web page.

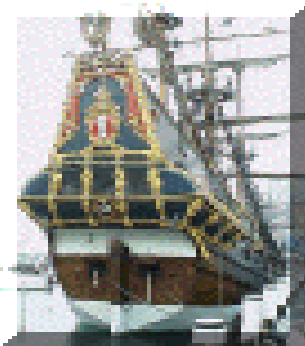
THE STORY.

This story has all the ingredients for what my generation called a "Boys Own Paper" adventure. Indeed Rosemary's article starts with the sentence, "Desertion, Mutiny and murder awaited the crew on the unfortunate ship". Frankly I think she understated the brutality of the events and even the

eventual brutality of the punishments for the perpetrators of such crimes. But I go ahead of myself.

It is not the purpose of this article to retell the story of the Batavia, but rather to use it as a stepping stone to looking at the bobbins that they found on the wreck, but having whetted your appetite I must at least précis the events for you.

The East India Company ships took a short cut from the Cape of Good Hope by sailing across the ocean as far as they could without landing.



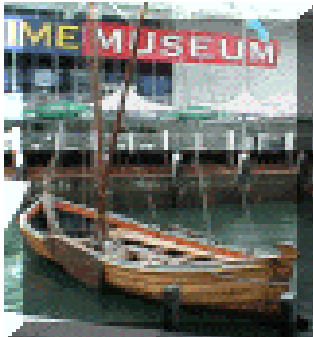
in Australia, then taking a sharp left turn (North) a sailing up to Jakarta (Batavia in those days) The trouble is that this ship struck the Houtman's Abrolhos reef about 80 kms. West of what is now known as Geraldton on the west coast of Australia.

The Batavia was the flagship of the Company and was on its maiden voyage under the overall command of an East India company man named Fransisco Palseart, but the ship was sailed by a Captain Jacobs (I am not totally sure of his name, I am telling this story as much from memory as the few notes in Rosemary's article) The ship became separated from the rest of the fleet soon after the Cape, and some suggest that this was deliberate because the Captain had already made a decision to seize the ship and its valuable cargo and turn to piracy.



The reef comprises coral debris and a few barren Islands. When the ship struck it did not break up immediately thus allowing the 340 passengers, army and crew to attempt to get ashore. Over the next few days about 300 of them got ashore by various means, the remaining drowned in the attempt. Even during this crisis there were a group of men who looted the ship of its valuables and particularly the alcohol and their drunken activities hampered the evacuation process. Finally one man was left on board, Jeronimus Cornelisz, the most charismatic and dedicated mutineer, but a person who had a morbid fear of the water. It was some days after all had left that he was forced to grab some debris and cling on to it until he was washed ashore (miraculously as it took two days!) on the same island as the survivors. During this period of time, the Company leader and the Capt in together with some crew and passengers took to the two longboats to seek rescue.

A reconstructed Long boat. They sailed to Batavia in two of these.



In the absence of these senior men, it was not long before Cornelisz took over the running of the island, and though they had found some natural food and very limited water, the resources were stretched to a maximum. It was on this pretence that he tricked the 40 soldiers who were on board to find another island with more water on it. In fact Cornelisz marooned them on another island in the hope that they would die of thirst. (In fact they found water on the island)

The story now goes to its most horrific period. On the pretext that there was a need to reduce the population so that remainder could survive, the mutineers (and those that they coerced in fear of their lives) set about murdering some 125 of the survivors. They did this through drowning, throat cutting and sword thrust. The worst was that they got to like killing

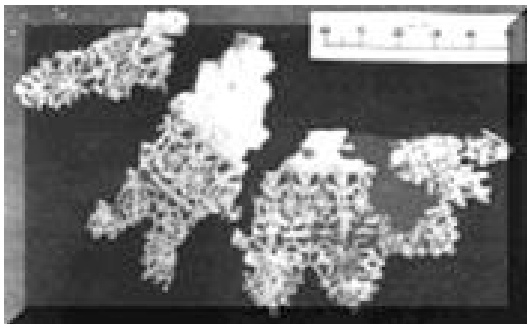
and blindfolded a 10 year old boy on the pretext that would play blind mans bluff. In fact they were seeing g if they could decapitate a person with one swipe of the sword. They did!!

One survivor managed to survive and swam to the island where the soldiers were and told of the dreadful events. Through this information the soldiers prepared for the worst themselves. In dur course the pirates attacked them and were beaten off. Another attack took place and the soldiers again won the encounter, this time actually beating Cornelisz at his own game of trickery, and captured him. Just as this was happening Palsaert sailed into site with the rescue ship.

Dutch law required a hearing / trial before justice could be done, but what took place was very perfunctory. The ringleaders were punished by chopping off their hands followed by hanging and various other brutal methods of putting to death or maiming. Two were actually put ashore on the Mainland and became the first Europeans to live on the island, but we nothing of their fate.

On return to Batavia, more trials took place and more hangings and imprisonment. Even those who were coerced into the brutality were treated the same as the pirates. The Captain was imprisoned, and Palsaert was disgraced and died within a couple of years.

THE BOBBINS.



The following is taken from Rosemary's article.

"The excavation report and the catalogue describes it as "Italian Lace", made of linen fibre, but it is very much like the lace described by Santana Levey as Flemish. The lace was found protruding from the concretion in a Barbers bowl. Fragments of two different laces were found but only sufficient of one piece remains to give a complete idea of its design"

At the time of writing I am trying to gain more information on these bobbins. Up until the present time we have believed that there were only two bobbins

found on the ship, and we do not know the location of the find. The pictures of the bobbins were part of a 90-cent stamp and are reproduced below. I am trying to gain more information from the Maritime museum in Western Australia.



We have always assumed that they were made of wood, but my early researches have cast doubt upon this and it is quite possible that they were both made of pewter, the bottom bobbin more especially. I also have some vague information that there were possibly 4 or even 5 bobbins found. On these aspects of the bobbins I will keep you informed as information comes to hand.

Though the catalogue states that the lace is Italian, the bobbins are certainly not the shape or style of what we understand Italian bobbins to have been. The top bobbin is fairly typically Flemish and the bottom bobbin has many hallmarks of what we know as Danish bobbins. The decoration of the shank is one characteristic of some Danish bobbins, and the groove around the almost spherical tail of the shank is more than reminiscent of a groove for beads.

The researches and discussion on these bobbins continues.

Brian

Just a note about what I need to find out. It has come as the result of a couple of books written about the Batavia, and one of them talks about the possibility of one of the bobbins being made from pewter? I have written to the WA Maritime museum about this and few other questions also. It has not been a very fruitful enquiry. I admit it was a longish time ago, so I might well try again.