

MEDIA RELEASE

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World's oldest surviving beer revived in QVMAG collaboration

The City of Launceston's Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery (QVMAG) has partnered with the Australian Wine Research Institute (AWRI) and LION's James Squire Brewery to develop a beer from yeast found in a ship wrecked off Tasmania more than two centuries ago.

The *Sydney Cove* was a merchant ship travelling from India to the British Colony of Port Jackson when it was wrecked off Preservation Island in Bass Strait in November, 1797.

The *Sydney Cove*'s contents included tea, rice and tobacco plus more than 30,000 litres of highly-prized alcohol. The icy waters of Bass Strait allowed yeast in these sealed bottles of beer to stay alive for far longer than any previously known yeast.

Following excavation of the wreck between 1977 and the 1990s, QVMAG obtained the ship's objects including beer bottles for its collection, many of which are now on display at Inveresk.

Years later the contents in the bottles was re-examined and QVMAG worked with scientists at the AWRI to isolate the yeast. Using skills honed working with wine yeast, the AWRI identified its genetic make-up and found it was a rare hybrid strain which differs from modern ale strains.

The yeast was then taken back to the laboratory where experimental brews were born and the journey to commercialise the product began.

Completing the final piece of the puzzle, QVMAG is excited to announce it has partnered with James Squire to produce a special limited edition beer made from the 220 year-old yeast, aptly named *The Wreck - Preservation Ale*.

Brewers at James Squire's Malt Shovel Brewery rose to the challenge of creating a beer from yeast that had a mind of its own. After some trial and error using modern brewing techniques to craft the centuries-old yeast, the team has delivered a Porter-style beer with hints of blackcurrant and spices, giving it a rich and smooth taste.

The Wreck - Preservation Ale will be officially launched at the upcoming Great Australian Beer Spectacular in Melbourne and Sydney. The product will be available on tap at James Squire brew houses around the country from June.

Launceston Mayor Albert van Zetten said a percentage of profits will come back to fund further QVMAG research into the *Sydney Cove* collection.

"This exciting commercial opportunity wouldn't have been possible without our staff's meticulous conservation of the *Sydney Cove* collection, which we hope to now build upon."

"Congratulations to QVMAG, the AWRI and James Squire on bringing a 220 year-old ale back to life for beer-lovers across the country to enjoy. This collaborative effort is sure to add a new, intriguing chapter to the nation's history of beer."

The Mayor, QVMAG Director Richard Mulvaney and Conservator David Thurrowgood will be available for interview at the *Sydney Cove* Collection at the [Museum at Inveresk today at 12pm.](#)