

MEDIA RELEASE

Issued: Thursday 9 November, 2017

Oldest European object ever found on Australian soil on display at QVMAG

An artefact left in Australia by early Dutch mariners goes on display this week at the City of Launceston's Queen Victoria Art Gallery at Royal Park.

In 1616, Dirk Hartog, captain of the Dutch East India Company ship *De Eendracht*, encountered the west coast of Australia. The ship was on a voyage to Asia, and did not turn north early enough.

Hartog and his crew landed on what is now known as Dirk Hartog Island, near Shark Bay, and on 26 October became the first confirmed Europeans to see Western Australia.

As proof of his presence there, Hartog nailed a flattened pewter dish to a pole with an inscription to mark his landing. It is the oldest European object ever found on Australian soil.

Eighty years later, in early 1697, the Dutch explorer Willem de Vlamingh landed on the island and found the Hartog plate, which lay half-buried in sand. He replaced it with a new plate, which reproduced Hartog's original inscription and added notes of his own, and took Hartog's original with him to Batavia. It was then transferred back to Amsterdam.

The plate has remained in the Netherlands since, but has now returned to mark 400 years since Hartog left the inscribed plate in Australia. QVMAG is the last Australian museum to exhibit this artefact, from 10 to 26 November 2017.

While the plate is in Australia, QVMAG Conservator David Thurrowgood and Rijksmuseum Metals Conservator Tamar Davidowitz will be undertaking international collaborative research on the plate. They will travel to the Australian Synchrotron in Melbourne to collect x-ray fluorescence images of the plate. The results of the scan should give valuable information about the current condition of the plate, largely due to its long exposure to extreme weather, and which will assist in its preservation. The scan will also help to understand the material composition of the plate and could potentially reveal surface details that have not perviously been visible.

The plate will be returning to the Netherlands after this research is completed, and it is very unlikely to return in our lifetimes.

Launceston Mayor Albert van Zetten says the Dutch have had a long association with Australia and this includes Tasmania.

"The name Tasmania derives from Abel Tasman, the Dutch mariner who was the first European to land in Tasmania."

"We're proud to have the Dirk Hartog plate on display at QVMAG. We thank the Rijksmuseum for the opportunity to allow Tasmanians to view this internationally significant object."

QVMAG History Curator Jon Addison and Rijksmuseum Metals Conservator Tamar Davidowitz will be available for comment today at the Art Gallery at Royal Park at 11am.