

*Disturbances at the French Annexation site on Dirk Hartog Island:
a report in readiness for the 2006 fieldwork*



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*Cover Illustration: The French bottle and its finders at Turtle Bay, Dirk Hartog Island.
Photo Myra Stanbury.*

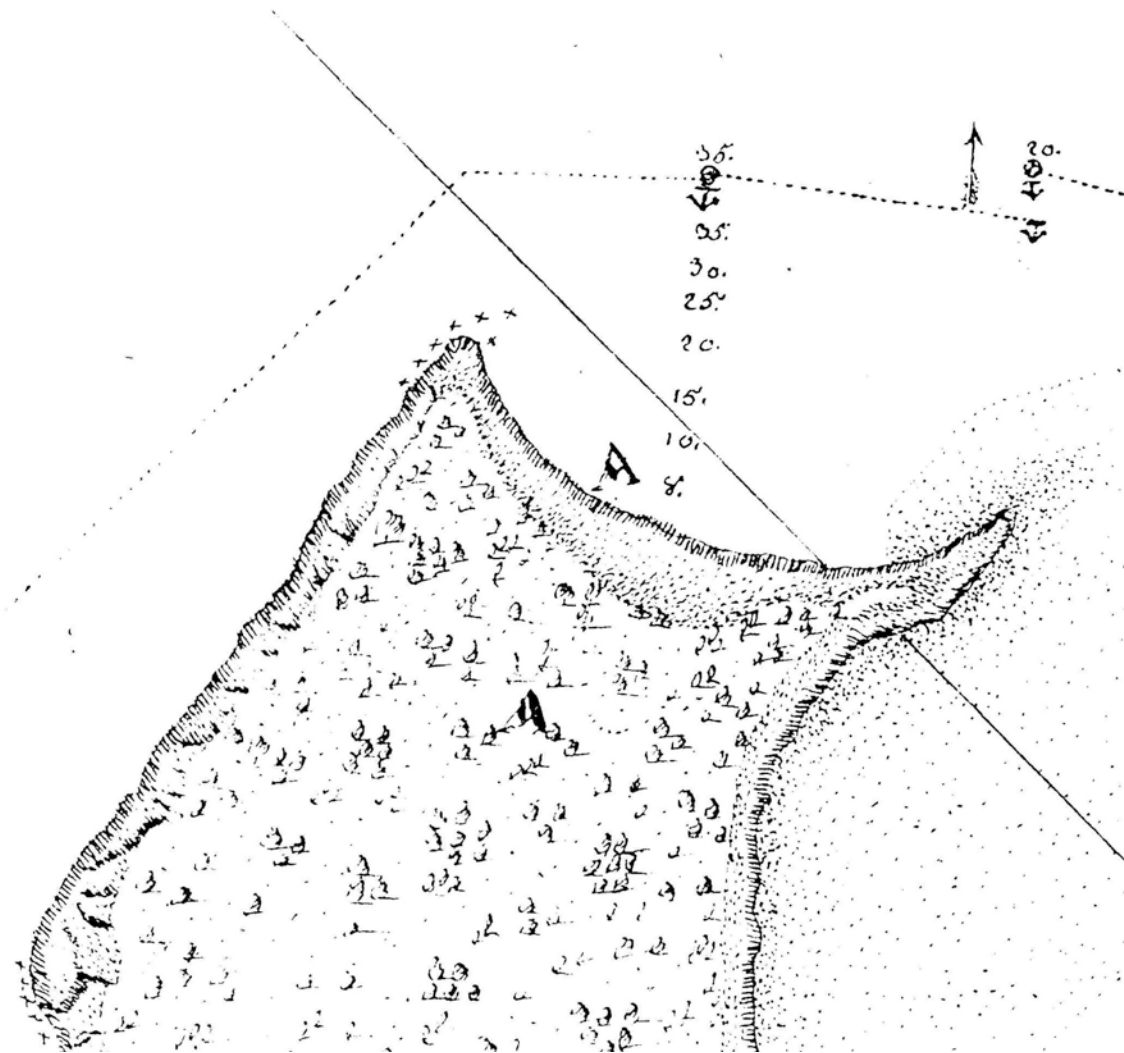
ABSTRACT

This report, completed in preparation for the Department of Maritime Archaeology's October 2006 return to the site, following the receipt of a grant resulting from the National Heritage listing of the north end of Dirk Hartog Island examines all known and suspected disturbances at the French 'annexation site' in that area up to and following the 1998 finding of a bottle, two capsules and two coins related to the annexation process. The report also examines the possibility that the annexation bottle remains.

Background

The well-known 30 March 1772 annexation of the coast adjacent Turtle Bay on Dirk Hartog Island by de Saint-Aloüarn has resulted in many searches for the annexation materials he deposited on the island. Though there are slight variations in the translation of the contemporary accounts, these objects are a 'formal document of possession . . . placed [inserted] in a bottle and buried at the foot of a small shrub [tree], near to which were placed two six franc coins'. (e.g. Dunbabin, 1921, Caldwell, 1934, Godard and de Kerros, 2002).

Figure 1: Detail from the Rosily chart of April 1772, showing Turtle Bay at the north end of Dirk Hartog Island, St Aloüarn's anchorage, the boat soundings, and the annexation site. The 'A' inland is believed to mark the furthest point traveled inland. That location will be examined in the coming fieldwork.



In January 1998 a lead capsule containing a French *écu* dated 1766 and some fifteen glass fragments originally thought to have been from the 'annexation bottle' were found on the ridge overlooking Turtle Bay. They had been located by a team led and financed by French researcher and author M. Philippe Godard and coordinated by Mr Max Cramer, a local maritime identity (Gibson

to McCarthy, 19/1/1998). The site was subsequently inspected and a report filed (McCarthy, 1998).

Figure 2: The coin and capsule. Photo Patrick Baker.



In the following April, a metal-detection team comprising expert prospectors Mr Bob Sheppard, Mr Bob Creasy and the author located an intact bottle 'closed' with a lead capsule similar to that found by the earlier team (Sheppard, 1998a). Initially thought to be the 'annexation bottle', it was later found not to contain any evidence of the document—though the capsule did have another French *écu* dated 1767 secured inside (Stanbury, 1999a). This led to a belief held in some circles that the two finds may be pointers to the presence of a missing bottle containing a 'document of possession' (e.g. Sheppard, 1998b). In order to test this hypothesis there has been a number of investigations into the form of the annexation processes elsewhere, leading some to believe that the annexation document and/or its bottle may no longer exist (e.g. Harrison, 1998; Stanbury, 1999b). While this view may be correct, it is evident that efforts to locate the 'annexation bottle' remain justified if only to be able to state that the Museum has effected, and will continue to effect, state-of-the-art remote sensing surveys of the annexation site until all indications are that the bottle no longer remains. Additionally, there also remain fears that even if it does still exist, its form—if it had been sealed without a lead closure or coin on the top, as has apparently been the case elsewhere, e.g. the Dufresne case—may prove undetectable without more sophisticated equipment such as ground penetrating radar. (Godard, pers. com., 25/09/2006).

Figure 3: The bottle and capsule, before being opened. Photo Patrick Baker.



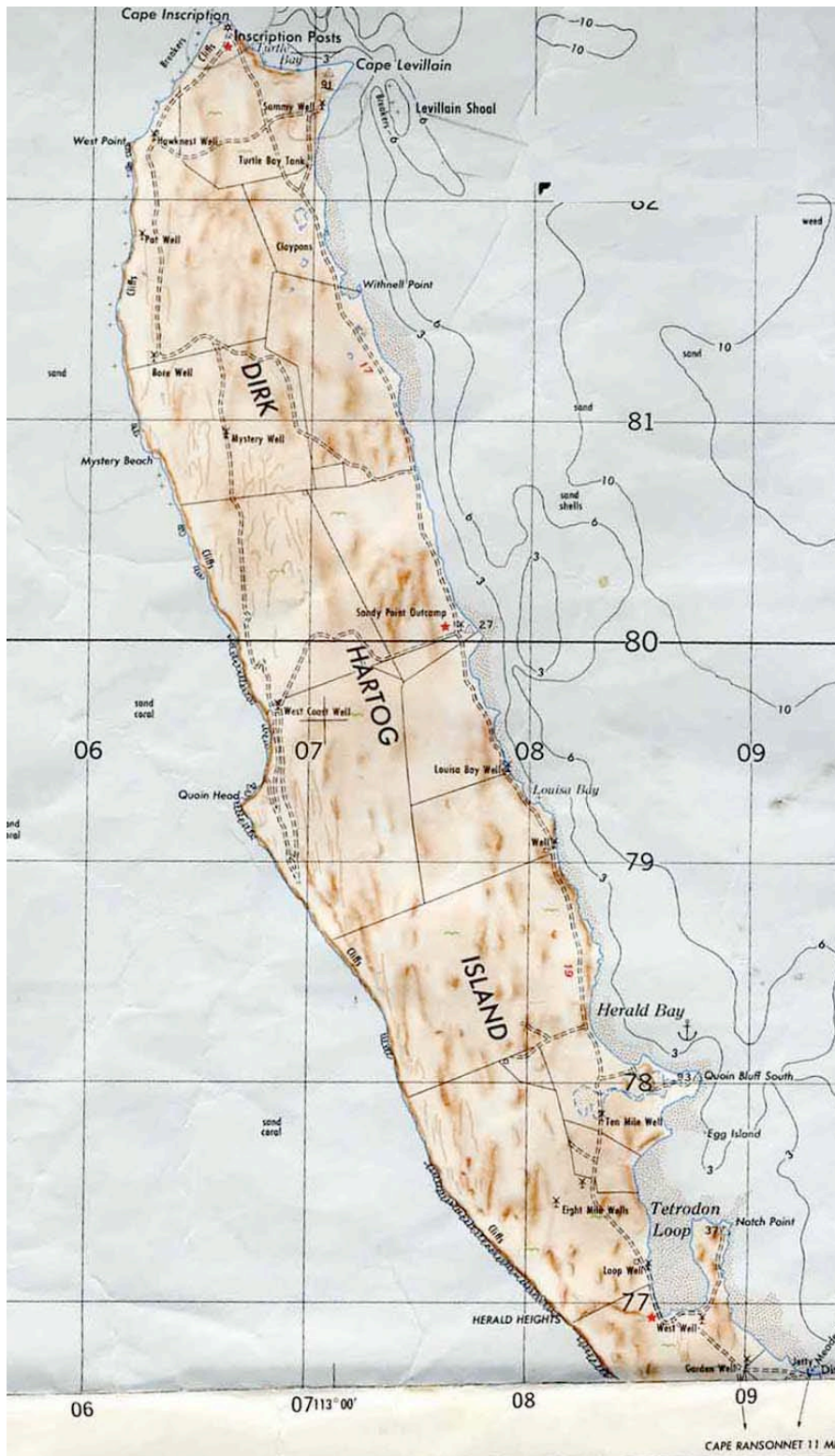
Previous disturbances at the ‘annexation site’.

Though Aboriginal people are not known to have occupied Dirk Hartog Island for any but brief visits to the southern end in the modern era, a permanent human presence commenced after F.L.Von Bibra established Dirk Hartog Island station in the mid 1860s (Cooper, 1997: 20-28; Edwards, 1999: 279-83). Local Aboriginal and part-Aboriginal people are expected to have become part of the Station labour force after that time with some of the famous names in station folklore, e.g. the late Tom Pepper Jr., prominent amongst those who have worked on the station.

Though active on the south eastern part where Von Bibra established his homestead in the 1860s, Aboriginal and European station hands would have travelled throughout the island on horseback and would have made sporadic visits to the annexation area to tend stock or to rest after visiting the line of wells established along the eastern shores. Later as the station developed they also sank also line of wells through the island centre. As is the case with most station folk, they would sometimes have made forays to the east coast to get water from soaks just behind the fore-dune, or to camp and to fish. The Aboriginal hands may also have visited Turtle Bay to harvest turtles and/or eggs—a time-honoured custom. It is also expected that the station people generally would have camped on the ridge overlooking Turtle Bay, it being normally sheltered with a good view of the area below. Surface relics, especially glass would have been readily seen from horseback and, if of interest and/or value they would most likely have been picked up and possibly removed.

Thought their visits would have been sporadic, ship’s crews in passage along the coast would have anchored in Turtle Bay, a splendid haven in the southerlies that blow from November through to March.

Figure 4: Dirk Hartog Island, showing some of the places named. Note Sammy Well at the north east end, and Turtle Bay. (Excerpt of Shark Bay, SG 49-8. 1:250,000)



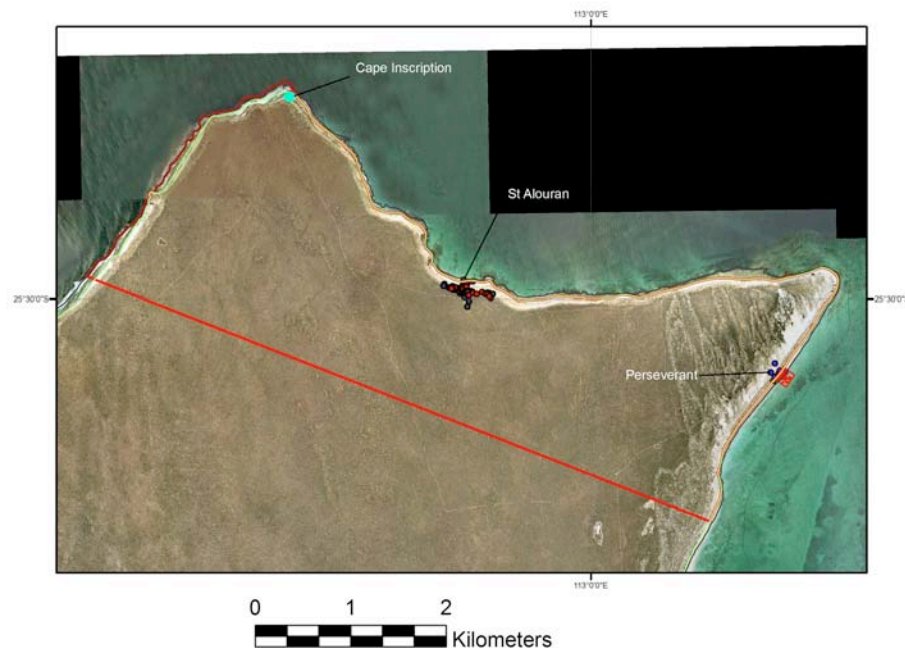
In the mid-1870s pearlers became the next recognized group to visit Dirk Hartog Island and to establish a base there. Though they were numbered in the hundreds throughout Shark Bay, the pearlers are not expected to have had

much impact on the annexation area, however. Their centre on the island was much further south at Tetraddon Loop, nearby Notch Point and at Herald Bay where Von Bibra appears to have maintained a landing at least. For the pearlers this also became a watering point and post office. Nonetheless, like other mariners they could have called into Turtle Bay for shelter and may have climbed the hills adjacent to replenish their firewood supplies. It is also evident that were they to attempt to access the hinterland via the ridge overlooking Turtle Bay, then the gully leading up to the annexation place from the beach was, for any mariner coming ashore, the easiest climb. It is expected that as a result they would have passed within a very few metres of the annexation place. Indeed it is by using this logic that the finders of the first of the French relics, the team led by Philippe Godard, fixed their search area (See description in McCarthy, 1998).

After their importation in the mid 1870s, a 'Malay' presence also commenced on the Island. Generally, though incorrectly called 'Malays' these people were indentured labourers from a variety of places, notably from the lands to Australia's north, including present-day Indonesia, the Phillipines, Timor, Singapore and Malaysia. Though required to be paid and then repatriated at the end of their agreed time, some were abandoned by their employers and many stayed on (McCarthy, 1990). As but one example of their lasting effect, one of best known occupants of a station out-camp at what is now known as Sammy's Well, behind the fore dune just south of Cape Levillain was Sammy Hassan (Edwards, 1999: 281). Possibly one of those 'Malays' abandoned in the Bay by Charles & Daniel Broadhurst in the 1870s, he was also known as 'Sammy Malay' and apparently he left the area for Walga Rock around 1917 (McCarthy, 2000: 60-2). Being in residence nearby he must have come across the camp of the survivors from the *Persévérant*, for it lies only a few hundred metres north of the Well. His camp is also only a few kilometers walk from St Aloüarn's annexation place (See Figures 4 & 5). Sammy is also reputed to have regularly presented the station owner's wife with two gold coins around Christmas time. These were apparently recovered from a nearby wreck, possibly the *Persévérant*. It is generally accepted, however, that this reference, and some of the other legends surrounding Sammy Hassan, while having some elements of truth, are somewhat exaggerated, if not entirely false (Edwards, 1999:281).

Other than materials conveyed off the island by the pearlers, it is evident that given the difficulties of travel on horseback, bulky materials would have been left in situ or discarded at the finder's camp. Only if easily portable would they have been retained as souvenirs or curios. There is, for example, anecdotal evidence conveyed by Mr Les Moss, President of the Shire of Shark Bay—who at the time was also President of the Maritime Heritage Association—to the effect that sometime in the 20th Century a bottle was located on the ridge overlooking Turtle Bay. Apparently a station hand, in 'cracking the bottle' (hitting the neck against a hard object) to sever the neck (with the intention of retrieving its usually liquid contents), found a 'parchment' inside. According to this legend, the paper was taken down to the homestead where it was lodged in the library, only to be lost when fire destroyed the homestead soon after Sir Thomas Wardle took possession (Moss pers. com.). Perhaps the coin and capsule found in the January 1998 search once 'closed' its contents, for after having seen the bottle, the stockman could well have prised off the closure and discarded it without looking to see what it contained—for normally closures do not secure any but a cork. This then could account for the Godard/Cramer find of a closure with a coin inside, but with no evidence of a French bottle nearby.

Figure 6: A GIS image showing the north end and the proximity of the historic sites. J. Green & DOLA. The red line shows the boundary of the area successfully nominated to the National Heritage List in May 2006.



The construction of light rail, horse stables, a jetty, a water catchment system, concrete living quarters and sheds served to ensure that the builders of the lighthouse and the ancillary facilities had a prolonged occupation in the area. As the rail system stretched from the lighthouse east through the hinterland and back to the coast past a winder shed located just back from the cliffs, they also had a significant physical impact at the annexation site.

Figure 7: Construction at Turtle Bay. C. R. Hunter collection. Department of Maritime Archaeology.



From there the rail progressed over the crest and down a steep slope and onto a jetty in the Bay. The shed and rail in this area lie only 40 metres west of what is now known to be the 'annexation site'. The workers also carted the water needed for concreting from Sammy's Well (Cooper, 1997: 21). As a result the construction teams traveled across much of the north end of the island and spent considerable time near the annexation site. They camped on the beach and adjacent the winder shed and are also expected to have accessed the beach via a gulley that passes close to the annexation site.

Figure 8: One of the builder's tents near the winder shed. C. R. Hunter collection.

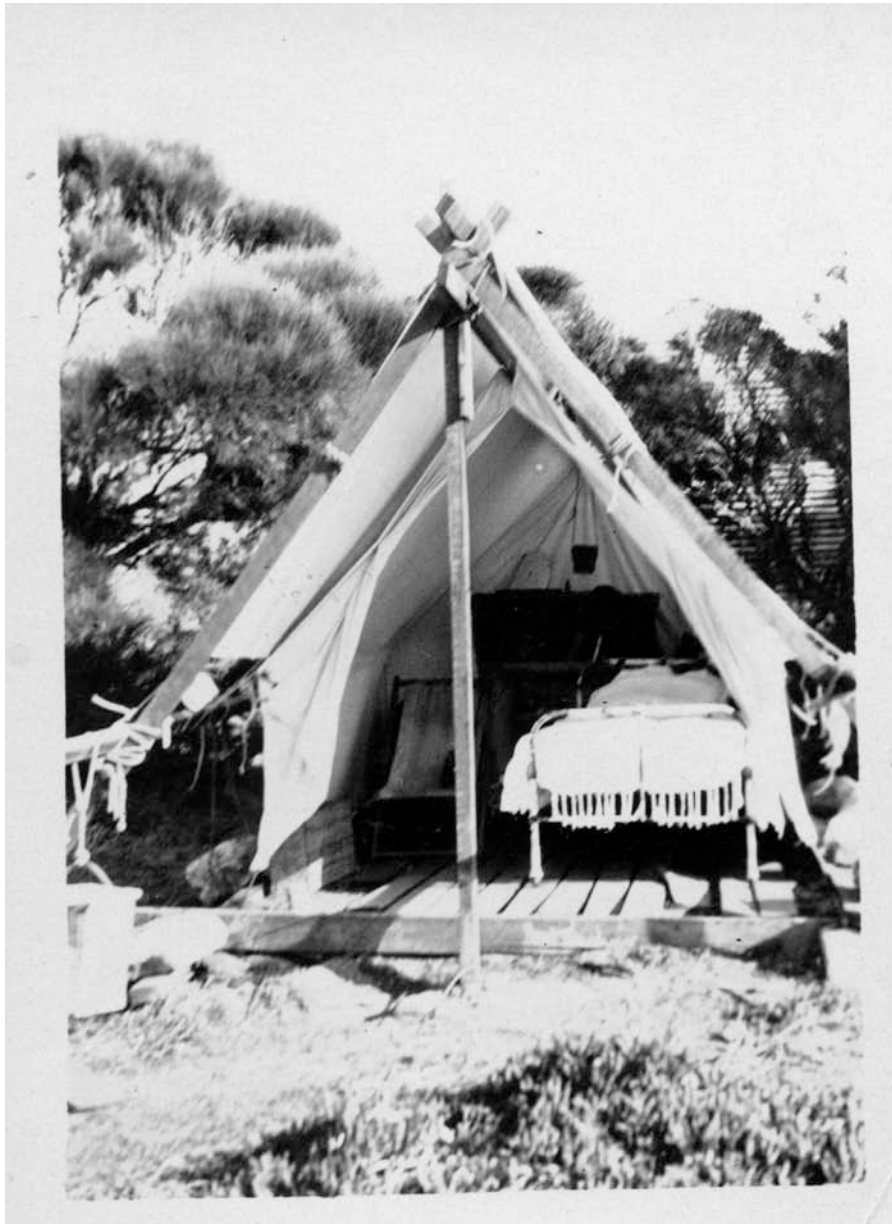


Figure 9: Construction on the ridge at Turtle Bay. C.R. Hunter collection.



Figure 10: The light rail and jetty, with the builder's camp. C.R. Hunter collection.



Finally the workers erected a fence that passes just east of the annexation site down over the slope and onto the beach and they are now also known to have recovered historic materials in the course of their work.

In May 1999, for example, a Dutch copper coin dated 1768 and highly degraded French 2 sol piece dated 1792 or 3 and were donated to the WA Maritime Museum by the son of one of the builders, Mr C.R. Hunter. His father had found these and other coins while working on the jetty and light rail. Unfortunately some went missing over the intervening years and it was only the remaining two that were donated along with documents and a number of photographs depicting the structure and the camp on the beach.

Figure 11: The coins donated by the Hunter family. Patrick Baker.



In respect of the coins, Mr Hunter was not able to provide any details of the circumstances of their location, nor any details of those lost. Nonetheless an examination by the Museum's Numismatist Professor Walter Bloom, indicates

that the 2 sol piece at least was related not to the 1772 annexation, but possibly to the French whaler *Persévérant* that was wrecked nearby in 1841. Though the Dirk Hartog Island light was automated in 1917 and the residences vacated, one annual official visitation was the Government Lighthouse tender and its amphibian DUKW that traveled inland via the track in from Sammy Well to replenish the light (Cumming et al., 1995). The first official search for annexation relics appears to date from these activities, partly as a result of agitation from a researcher with the Royal Western Australian Historical Society, Miss Kate Caldwell. In response to her letters, the then surveyor general replied that ‘. . . at the first convenient opportunity, I will have a search made to see if it would be possible to locate the tree and whatever was buried near it’. (RWAHS Box 24 1973/11). In 1934 not long after these letters were written, crew from the tender *Cape Otway* attempted a search, but were unable to land in the high seas then running however. The Captain did note that the land had been ‘denuded of timber by fishermen and possibly previous lightkeepers’. (Caldwell to Henn, 2/8/1934, RWAHS Box 24 1973/11). Here are further indications of the extent of the activity in the annexation area. While it is not known whether another attempt was made by the lighthouse service, and while visitation by sea appears to have been quite common, casual visitation by land was difficult throughout this period with the station homestead well over 40 km distant by land.

Later, in the 60s the advent of long-range professional and recreational fishing vessels based in Denham and their attraction to Turtle Bay and its environs saw further fossicking. The objects of interest were notably the *Persévérant* survivor’s camp, the military encampment at Quoin Bluff to the south and Sammy Well just south of the *Persévérant* camp. The last of these came to public attention in August 1960 when the Daily News published an account of Foxy Delaney, the 13-year-old daughter of a fisherman, who found the *Persévérant* survivor’s camp and many relics. This find was followed by a number of expeditions involving well-known author Hugh Edwards, followed by considerable press (*Daily News* 8 & 9 August 1960). Later stockman Tom Pepper Jr also recovered materials from the site (pers. com.).

Modern Searches

The searches and fossicking by the lighthouse personnel, station folk and the construction gangs were followed in recent times by a number of well-researched ventures in search of the French relics. This was partly as a result of a surge of interest in the extensive ‘French connection’ with these shores after the earlier fascination with the Dutch and their treasure ships subsided. In the 1970s for example, numerous expeditions were led by the late Assoc. Professor Leslie Marchant, the then Director of the *France Australe Research Centre* at Notre Dame University. Author of the seminal tome *France Australe*, his works served to bring public focus onto the part played by the French, for until then their role was appreciated by but a few academics (e.g. Appleyard and Manford, 1979).

From the mid 1980s on, after the author had assumed responsibility for the wreck inspection program, numerous requests were made of Leslie Marchant to join with the Museum, or failing that, to provide an indication of the locations had had searched and the type of systems used (Marchant to McCarthy, 14/8/1993). Having expended considerable amounts of time and money in pursuit of the French, he declined to make his results known unless he were able to recoup his costs from the Museum, however. Though quite well-funded in shipwreck research, the Museum had no official brief in respect of explorers and their activities, however and given the speculative nature of the annexation

relics search, and with a massive backlog of known sites to manage, the Museum was in no position to accede to his request. Further, while contemplating the feasibility of the Museum conducting its own searches the author received advice from Marchant that his searches were numerous, well-researched, comprehensive, and well-equipped with sophisticated metal-detectors—the best available at the time and in that context the Museum would be wasting public funds if it were to proceed (Marchant, pers. com.). It was at that point and with that advice in mind that any thought that the Museum might expend public funds in search of the French annexation relics was shelved.

Leslie Marchant's expeditions are believed to have been around nine in number (Harrison, 1998) and they were followed in 1989, by the most publicised expedition in search of the annexation materials to that date. It was led by M. George Lucas a former French diplomat, using 'half a dozen metal detectors'. Though they found only clothing, wire, nails, bottle tops, cans, and other detritus, these activities received considerable press (e.g., *The West Australian* 14/1/1989, *Weekend Supplement*). Though assisted in his endeavours by Mr John Sellinger, then a civic leader at Shark Bay, Lucas was actually preceded by a Shark Bay school group that in the previous year had joined with Mr Sellinger on the occasion of the Australian Bicentennial celebrations. They had apparently also erected grids over an area on the ridge near the annexation site and performed a search in each for indications of the French presence (Pers Comm G. Wardle and CALM Officers, 28/3/1998, Wreck Inspection Day Book #6: 94).

Adding to these disturbances, with the advent of tourism on the island in this same period, recreational 4WD's began regularly accessing the area, some carrying metal detecting equipment. For them Turtle Bay and the *Persévérant* camp were a natural focus and are some are believed to have conducted metal detector searches there (R. Sheppard, pers.com.). They are also expected to have operated on the ridge overlooking Turtle Bay where a number of temporary military occupations of the ridge overlooking Turtle Bay had also occurred. These were for the purpose of establishing hydrographic stations and also to conduct exercises, including the firing of weapons at targets in the bay. Sometimes it also involved the digging of trenches and 'hides' in which to camp and from which to fire their weapons. Most of this is unrecorded, though it is known that on one occasion crew from HMAS *Geraldton* visited in order to examine reports that a body from HMAS *Sydney II* had been buried along the rail line just inland from the winder shed at the head of the light rail serving the jetty (HMAS Sydney File, 630/31). Other maritime visitations to the bay were sometimes recorded in paint on the internal walls lining the shed and these were visible until it collapsed in recent times.

Thus there has been considerable disturbance of the annexation area, most of it unrecorded. Some is visible today and though the numerous overgrown trenches and other disturbances emanating from this activity are evident to the practiced eye, it is difficult to separate those caused by the early searchers and those which have resulted from defence force training exercises which were conducted on the ridge well into the 1990's.

The finding of French relics

Alerted to the French coin find, the author conducted a brief inspection of the site with the aid of expedition co-leader Mr Max Cramer and a crew from WA Newspapers (Carmelo Amalfi journalist and John Mokritzki photographer). A

report was subsequently lodged (McCarthy, 1998) and a great deal of press ensued.

In essence, the 'find', an ecu enclosed in a lead capsule, apparently of a design similar to those in use on champagne bottles today, was found at the base of a large 'wattle' bush overlooking Turtle Bay (See Figure 11). This site lies only 40 metres east of the light rail. In this instance, Godard/Cramer team team utilised three metal detectors, including a then 'state-of-the-art' SD2000 Minelab detector of the type that had proved successful in the prospecting industry. This equipment together with Rosily's map and the application of 'common-sense' logic applied to the question where would the French have come ashore and where would they have ascended the cliff, were apparently the key factors in they proving successful where others like Marchant had not.

Initially disappointed, having been beset with many metallic signals from objects such as drink cans, munitions and other detritus along the ridge above Turtle Bay, the team first thought that their 'find' was even more rubbish, just a piece of crumpled lead sheet—from an old fishing box or camp—and as a result they almost threw it away with other detritus. Subsequent re-examination of the find that evening led to the discovery of a French coin inside, though even then it had proved difficult to discern within the capsule, such was the layer of dirt and grit on each. This in turn led to the excavation of the area in which it was found (H. Gibson to McCarthy, 19/1/1998; Press release, P. Godard, 21/1/1998). Shovels were used in excavating a large area on the crest of the ridge at the coin find and the sand and other material down slope to the north west. Later the finders erected a sign at the foot of the small tree commemorating the French and their find. See below.

Figure 11: The site of the first find. The coin was found at the foot of the bush near the sign. M. McCarthy



Mr Cramer also indicated the remains of numerous other metal detector 'strikes' along the ridge to the west and also past the light rail (left of this photo), being large quantities of assorted munitions, tin cans and other objects. These had been excavated to an area about the width of a small hand-held shovel sometimes to a depth of c. 30cm., as is standard practice in any metal detecting environment. For site security reasons, the finder's sign was re-erected adjacent the site at the rail on the ridge.

The inspection report recommended *inter alia* that the area and the relics be declared historic and that further unauthorised excavation be prohibited. Provision for interpretive signage and the rehabilitation of the excavated areas was also made. Recommendations were also made for continued monitoring of the site and some form of the recognition of the finders for having succeeded where many others have previously failed. Finally with the aim of reducing the incentive for others to seek the materials remaining and further damage the site.

A metal-detector search of the area needs be implemented, thereby reducing the incentive for others to seek the materials remaining and to thereby further damage the site. This and an archaeological survey of the site, with provision for the rehabilitation of the excavated areas, needs be effected as soon as possible.

Preliminaries to the March/April 1998 Survey

Given the heavily-disturbed nature of the area, the perceived legal vacuum and the understanding that others were planning to proceed to the place in order to commence search and excavations, an overarching project brief was proposed that would result in the Museum 'being able to state that the coin area has been thoroughly searched, thereby reducing all temptation for others to proceed . . . with metal detectors and shovels' (McCarthy to Head of Department Jeremy Green, 18/2/1998). This recommendation, while a self-evident need to those charged with managing maritime sites—where looting and 'finder's keepers is a time-honoured pastime—requires explanation, for even as late as the 1990s metal detecting was still rejected as tantamount to treasure hunting in mainstream archaeological circles. The strategy was accepted by the Museum and its advisory structures, nonetheless and as things developed it proved doubly necessary. Though Philippe Godard, as expedition leader and financier believed the coin and capsule belonged to the State from the outset and though he wanted the finds immediately handed over—his co-finders did not, demanding recompense, claiming the coin as theirs. This all lead to a protracted, though since resolved, hiatus. Front page of the *West Australian* for 24/1/1998 carried the head *Brawl over who keeps rare coin*, for example. Many other press items appeared and many would have viewed this manifestation of the Museum's apparent inability to exercise the State's rights over the site and its relics with considerable interest. As a result, it was feared that others would be led to visit the site, as did prove the case.

Inherent in the proposed strategy was the need to 'survey adjacent and other potentially significant areas with the use of a metal detector . . . to determine the distribution of surface and/or subsurface material which may indicate further archaeological deposits, possibly containing a second French coin and/or glass bottle containing a parchment and to plot any finds using

Differential Global Positioning System' (Green to Museum Director Graeme Henderson, 19/2/1998).

Funds were acquired and the services of a contract archaeologist, Mr Rodney Harrison and an expert metal detector operator Mr Bob Sheppard were obtained. Though this was not the first time metal detection was used in an archaeological context, it being a common feature underwater, it was a relative rarity on land sites, for as indicated by one leading terrestrial archaeologist at the time, 'the whole metal detector thing is a major issue for some practitioners . . . The association is often seen as "metal detector—treasure hunt"'. However some of the credibility has been clawed back in the last 5 years or so...Ethically, I think there needs to be a well reasoned rationale and research design to account for their use. (Gibbs, to Stanbury, 12/2/1998. In that same philosophical context a precedent had been already set on these shores, for Sheppard a prospector, writer and publisher, had earlier worked on a broad-based program led by this author at land sites believed associated with the survivors of the VOC Ship *Zuytdorp* (1702-1712). This program also involved some very well-known terrestrial archaeologists (McCarthy, 1998; 2002).

Myra Stanbury was to lead the team and she also included as assistant terrestrial archaeologists to Mr Harrison, Ms Nikki Sinclair and Ms Corioli Souter a qualified maritime and terrestrial archaeologist. Rounding out the group, Mr Bob Creasy a well-known prospector was to assist Bob Sheppard in his work. Geoff Kimpton the museum's senior skipper and diver was to assist the author, the then 'Inspector of Wrecks', who was to help with logistical and transport arrangements for Stanbury's team and to conduct site inspections at other French deposition sites in the Bay. A non-disturbance remote sensing search for the remains of the French whaler *Persévérant* was also planned.

The March/April 1998 Survey

The Museum team and the metal detecting group arrived at the island on 26 March where they established camp. While awaiting Harrison's arrival Stanbury's metal detecting team deployed a Minelab SD2000 type and a 'new release', the SD2100 unit to the west of the old rail line on the ridge overlooking Turtle Bay in regions away from the 'coin site' (Sheppard, 1998b). Under the direction of Ms Stanbury, all 'strikes' were flagged, excavated, catalogued, bagged, and left in situ for subsequent depth and DGPS measurements under the supervision of Ms Souter (Dirk Hartog Island Field Diary: 25-30 March 1998). The finds included munitions ranging from small bore types used by civilian hunters through to high calibre military cartridges and bullets, camp rubbish, a belt buckle, button and a copper pot.

On arrival with Kimpton and the author, Mr Harrison then examined the entire ridge east and west of the rail and the area surrounding the 'coin site'. He concluded that it had been 'clearly modified' since the Museum's earlier visit, i.e. there had been more interference at the site. The spoil dump had been rehabilitated and was now barely visible, for example, and this appears to have been the work of some of the finders and a film crew who had returned to the site in the interim (Wreck Inspection Day book #8, 27/3/1998: p. 92).

On the following day a non-disturbance metal detector survey was commenced at the coin site itself, and an estimated 200 'strikes' were marked using plastic tape or 'pin flags'. While these indications were being assessed by the archaeological team in order to provide them with a better indication of where to sample the deposit, the metal detector operators continued their remote sensing survey in an area further east and it doing so also located a number of

old 'strike' or 'pin' flags' left by unknown previous searchers. There a wire fence marking the eastern boundary of the lighthouse reserve and evidence of excavations resulting from the earlier searches for French materials and/or trenches dug for military exercises were also found. In another area, just east of the tram line on the slope leading up towards the ridge, evidence of 'salting' was found. This appeared in the form of deliberately buried lead discs driven into the soil in an attempt to discourage or cause comic discomfort to subsequent metal detectors. Apparently it is common practice in the prospecting world. (Dirk Hartog Island Field Diary: 25-30 March 1998; (Wreck Inspection Day book #8, March 1998; Sheppard, 1998b)

Figure 12 Metal detector operators Bob Sheppard and Bob Creasy at work in one of the grids. (Myra Stanbury)



Three major conglomerations of material were indicated in this metal detector survey, the most prolific at the coin site itself.

On the basis of the surface indications, one of which was the remains of a large fire and the agglomeration of the metal detector strikes in the coin tree area, Mr Harrison then selected the sites for a number of test pits according to accepted archaeological method and began work. In this phase he was assisted by Stanbury, Souter and Sinclair (Harrison , 1998). With but two days remaining before departure, and in realizing that the three tests pits that had been selected (on the basis of surface indications and historical accounts) were sterile and that they constituted the entire area of ground intended for examination, the author reluctantly stepped in and assumed command and responsibility with a view to having all the 'strikes' examined.

Figure 13: A view of the site showing some of the 'strikes' awaiting analysis. Myra Stanbury. The coin tree is to the right. Out of frame right is the fence line, with the rail out of picture left.



Unwilling to be linked to these actions, Mr Harrison, Ms Stanbury *et al* then vacated the ridge, though it was agreed nonetheless that Harrison would be requested to return to excavate any historic materials found.

In effecting the examination of the strikes in the area around the Godard/Cramer 'coin site', in as systematic a fashion as possible, a series of two metre grid lines (delineated by two parallel 30 metre tapes) were established in a c. 20m by 14m rectangle centring on the 'coin tree'. Detection then commenced along the east side of this rectangle proceeding down each two metre swath. Each indication of metal was flagged and once each grid was completed, the 'strikes' within it were excavated with a plastic scoop and the results measured to traditional X, Y and Z co-ordinates. While the usual munitions, tins and metal detritus predominated, indications of a bottle were found in the 2 metre grid immediately east of the tree. Investigation along its upper surfaces revealed a lead closure and Mr Harrison was called back and requested to complete the excavation as earlier agreed.

Figure 14: The excavated bottle. Rodney Harrison.



The time taken to examine this find, the need for re-greening, the unresolved philosophical concerns and the author's commitments at sea in the following day (the last on site) precluded the examination of all the remaining two metre segments at the 'coin site' south and west of the tree, however. Only an examination of those strikes on a 'cardinal point' and other 'key' bearings was made outside the grid. i.e. it was believed that a coin and/or bottle(s) would have been buried in a systematic fashion. The historical and practical basis for these opinions were later conveyed in a paper prepared for the Museum by Bob Sheppard (1998a).

Mr Harrison's subsequent report refers to the author's actions as 'uncontrolled excavation and unsystematic surface artefact collection practices', all without an 'appropriate research design and methodology' (1998: 52) and an internal memo also served to highlight what was considered the 'unethical' nature of what had occurred (Stanbury to Green, 17 September, 1998). On the other hand, in an article appearing in the *Bulletin of the Australasian Institute for Maritime Archaeology* that subsequently assessed these actions it was noted that:

The area was delineated by baselines extending 17 m x 13 m and was mapped using 2 m grids with each indication of metal flagged and later excavated in those grids. Each excavation was recorded utilising X Y Z coordinates. The area surrounding the coin tree site was selected for a close plot metal detector survey as this area had the highest number of readings. The baselines were run through the area orientated to the North South cardinal points. . . . When the bottle was located, a controlled excavation was undertaken. It is clear that, had we not elected to use metal detector in this fashion, the discovery of the bottle would not have been possible especially

when considering the area to be covered and the time restraints. The research design not only had an archaeological dimension but was designed to ensure that the site was thoroughly examined and artefactual material identified. This was a CRM motivated investigation in light of the site's potential for souvenir hunting and looting. The amount of publicity the site received combined with the increased visitation rates and general isolation also motivated the investigation (Souter, 1999).

News of the find broke while the team were in the field, and in the expectation that the bottle might contain the annexation document there was considerable press locally, nationally and internationally.



Hunt goes on: Part of the search team, from left, prospector Bob Creasey, coordinator Myra Stanbury, prospector Bob Sheppard and terrestrial archaeologist Nikki Sinclair at Turtle Bay this week. PICTURE: JOHN MOKRZYCKI

Reward coin discoverers, says expert

BY CARMELO AMALFI

THE discoverers of an 18th century French coin buried on Dirk Hartog Island before the British annexed WA should be recognised properly and rewarded, according to WA Maritime Museum archaeologist Mike McCarthy.

That recommendation is one of several in a report by Dr McCarthy, who inspected the Turtle Bay site on January 21 — five days after a six-member expedition unearthed the silver coin, dated 1766.

Co-discoverer Kim Cramer said expedition leader Philippe Godard had received a congratulatory facsimile from French President Jacques Chirac. But there had been no feedback from Prime Minister

John Howard or Premier Richard Court.

"I suppose it depends on how important Australia values the discovery," he said yesterday.

Dr McCarthy, who is at the remote Shark Bay site with a second metal-detecting team, said legislation should be reassessed to have the area gazetted as an historic site.

The coin — which was wedged inside a lead capsule buried under a tree in 1772 by the crew of the French ship *Gros Ventre* — should be housed securely for further examination. The ship's log says the coin was buried with a second one and a bottle containing a declaration of possession of WA. Neither was found.

The new search for the second coin and

bottle is being coordinated by maritime archeology senior curator Myra Stanbury at Turtle Bay this week.

Dr McCarthy said Perth numismatist Walter Bloom was also of the impression that an attempt had been made to clean the coin of debris, believed to have resulted in scratches on both sides.

This was confirmed by expedition member Max Cramer to Ian MacLeod, head of the museum's conservation department, and by a comparison of photographs taken by Mr Godard.

Kim Cramer said his father, Max, had not admitted damaging the coin and that tests by Dr MacLeod revealed the scratches were caused when debris was removed from its surface.

Find prompts search for message in a bottle

BY CARMELO AMALFI

INSIDE this bottle, maritime archaeologists hope to find what is left of a 226-year-old message left by French sailors who claimed WA before the British.

In 1772, the crew of the *Gros Ventre* buried two coins and a bottled declaration annexing WA for France near a tree overlooking Turtle Bay on Dirk Hartog Island.

One of the coins, dated 1766 and wedged inside a lead capsule, was discovered in January by an expedition arranged by French historian Philippe Godard, of Noumea.

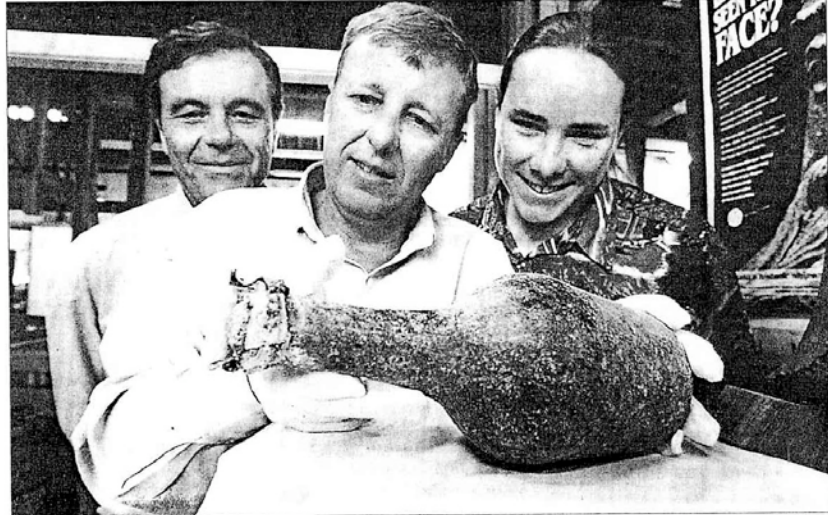
Last week, a WA Maritime Museum team coordinated by senior curator Myra Stanbury found what she believes is the bottle from the 18th century expedition.

The dark green wine bottle was found last Wednesday about 10m south of the coin tree and was sealed with a capsule similar to the one in which the coin was found.

"The lead capsule was the signal picked up by co-discoverers Bob Creasey and Bob Sheppard," she said before flying back to Perth on Saturday with the precious cargo.

"We then excavated very, very slowly, and the whole bottle was revealed intact."

Ms Stanbury said the bottle probably contained little or no trace of the parchment claiming French sovereignty of WA. She said insects small enough to crawl through the capsule may have finished



Buried treasure: Prospectors Bob Creasey and Bob Sheppard look on as archeologist Rodney Harrison examines the sealed bottle discovered on Dirk Hartog Island last week which could contain a declaration of French sovereignty over WA. PICTURE: RON DRAINE

"It looks as if there possibly is some motif or writing on the top of the capsule," said Ms Stanbury, who could not study it closer because of the need to keep the bottle away from sunlight and potential damage.

"But the interesting thing about this bottle is that it is an exact copy of the one found in 1772."

position, with the top facing towards Cape Levillain."

She said Mr Creasey had suggested a cardinal point theory, in which the bottle marked the apex of a triangle, the coin marking the north cardinal point.

"We will need to investigate further to see

whether the naval officers were given specific instructions as to how and where to place the bottle and coin," Ms Stanbury said.

The bottle, and any contents, could confirm French intentions to annex WA before the British arrived.

In a subsequent in-laboratory excavation co-ordinated by Ms Stanbury utilizing the services of many experts, evidence of a parchment or paper was not found within. Nonetheless, the bottle proved consistent in form with St Allouarn's time and a date on the coin later found secured in the lead closure proved conclusive in linking the objects with the annexation process.

While in their reports Mr Harrison and Ms Stanbury were also of the opinion that it was unlikely that other significant historical material such as the annexation bottle remained on the site, a contrary view was held by M. Godard Bob Sheppard and the author. As a result, in a memo outlining the processes above and stressing the need for urgent action and a return to the site, the following observations and recommendations were made:

Looting and metal detection will undoubtedly continue to occur at the St Allouarn site if the Museum is suspected of not having 'cleared' the area of attractive materials. The remains at the 'annexation site' are still at risk. . .

We need to act reasonably soon, for on the basis of the available evidence we now have some good reason to examine other potential French deposition sites, including the possible Hamelin Plate area on the NE end of Dirk Hartog Island. . . . Unfortunately I am aware that there is a third party interest in performing an unsupervised metal detector sweep of these areas. This has been warded off in the interim, but the notion has considerable and quite powerful support. Either we do it or someone else, with far less controls and archaeological infrastructure will and we will find ourselves with a repeat of the Godard/Cramer situation.

In the interim a set of procedures should be established to encompass the examination of sites similar to St Allouarn's in association with suitably-qualified and informed terrestrial archaeologists. This includes the rendering of

those sites 'safe' from looting and other unauthorised activities (McCarthy to Green, 4/9/1998)

It is in that context and with those antecedents that continued requests were made for a return to the site to conduct the required work. Funds were not forthcoming, though the impression that the Museum and its team had 'cleared' the site of historic materials in its 1998 season, did serve to reduce any temptation for others to act illegally at the site. In May 2003 whilst on a visit to the *Persévérant* camp with a view to preparing a grant application for further research and fieldwork a team led by Jeremy Green and Mark Staniforth of Flinders University visited the annexation site. On this visit they were advised by station hands that by then c. 30 vehicles per month were accessing the island (Wreck Inspection Day Book, No. 9, p. 110). Though a long 4WD haul north many would have been attracted to Turtle Bay and its historic sites. By May 2006 it became evident that others had become aware that all the metal detector 'strikes' at the annexation site had not been examined, requiring the Museum to act. Somewhat fortuitously, as a result of the successful nomination of the north end of Dirk Hartog Island to the National Heritage list, funding was received to complete archaeological works in the area. This included the annexation site.

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