

# ‘THE FURTHEST LIMIT or HOPE of THINGS’

Martin Woods reveals the solution to the puzzle of correctly attributing one of the Library's rarest manuscript charts

Accounts of explorations are illustrated in large measure by the efforts of chart makers. Their cartographic sketches allow interpretations which otherwise could not be achieved. Without them, we the readers, like many an early explorer, lack orientation. New research into the origins of a manuscript map—a hand-drawn chart copied from original material prepared during a voyage of exploration—in the National Library's collection has reopened interest in the voyage of Willem de Vlamingh to Australian shores in 1696–97, and shed new light on Dutch cartographic practices. Like the story of Vlamingh's expedition, the rediscovery of this chart is one of inspiration, disappointment and mishaps, and eventual enlightenment.

It is remarkable that the National Library of Australia has in its possession a manuscript chart of the Vlamingh expedition. Maps drawn in the hand of Dutch cartographers are virtually unheard-of in Australian public collections. Furthermore, worldwide, manuscript charts from the Vlamingh expedition may be counted on the fingers of one hand. There are known to be four manuscript map-sheets of the voyage and, thanks to the keen collecting eye of Edward Augustus Petherick, the Library has two of these in its possession. The large chart on two sheets, entitled *T Zuijd landt ontdeekt door Willem de Vlamingh in den Maande van Jan an February 1697 met t Yagt de Geelvink de Hooker de Nyptang ent Galjoot 't Weseltje* (The South Land explored by Willem de Vlamingh in the months of January and February), has been in the Library's possession since the Petherick Collection was transferred to



the Commonwealth in 1911. Until recently, however, its correct attribution and provenance were unrecognised. How this came about is a story as circuitous as that of Vlamingh's own voyage.

The cartographic evidence of Vlamingh's expedition is meagre. In addition to a large outline chart by the expedition's artist, Victor Victorszoon, apparently drawn in 1697 from Vlamingh's drawings and held by the Nationaal Archief, the Hague, there are known to be several coastal profiles also drawn by Victorszoon. The coast of the Australian mainland represented on the Library's chart is punctuated by numeric annotations relating to these coastal profiles, each indicating some experience or feature of interest.

In 1981, the Library was visited by the eminent cartographer Günter Schilder, an expert in Dutch cartography, who examined the Library's manuscript chart. In his subsequent publication *Voyage to the Great South Land: Willem de Vlamingh*

Jan and Nicholas Verkolje  
Untitled c.1690–1700  
oil on canvas; 26.5 x 32.0 cm  
Courtesy of the Australian National Maritime Museum  
Purchased with the assistance of the Bruce and Joy Reid Foundation, Mercantile Mutual, Philips Electronics Australia, Dr Harold Schenberg

This portrait of a gentleman, with a maritime scene on one side and a chart, cross-staff, astrolabe, chart dividers and celestial globe on the other, suggests a Dutch seafarer from the VOC of the 1690s, and is believed to be Willem de Vlamingh.



Gerard van Keulen (1678–1726)  
*T Zuidt landt ontdeekt door  
 Willem de Vlamingh in den  
 Maande van Jan an February  
 1697* [between 1697 and  
 1726]

coloured manuscript map on  
 two sheets; 57.0 x 96.8 cm,  
 56.8 x 96.8 cm  
 Map Collection  
[nla.map-rm751](#) and  
[nla.map-rm752](#)

This manuscript map was  
 drawn by van Keulen after  
 1704. It was originally drawn  
 by Willem de Vlamingh in  
 1697. The chart stretches from  
 the Swan River to Vlamingh  
 Head on North West Cape of  
 Western Australia.

1696–1697 (1985), Schilder revealed that the chart was a manuscript by Gerard van Keulen not, as previously thought, by Isaac de Graaff, the official chart-maker of the Chamber of Amsterdam, Dutch East India Company, who had copied Victorszoon's outline chart. According to Schilder, who carried out an exhaustive study of archives in the Netherlands, a second manuscript of the outline chart exists in the Hague, created by de Graaff. Remarkably, other than the chart in two sheets held by the Library, there are no other manuscripts of the survey. Since the Library's acquisition of the chart as part of the Petherick Collection, it was thought that the Library's chart was another copy produced by de Graaff, the official cartographer. Petherick pencilled this attribution on one of the sheets, dating the map to about 1701. This information was naturally transferred to the catalogue record, where it persisted until very recently, and was repeated in several publications. Most recently the de Graaff attribution has appeared in the National Library history *Remarkable Occurrences*, (2001), although it was recognised to be a manuscript chart by Michelle Hetherington, former National Library staff member and curator at the National Museum of Australia, in her caption for the Museum's exhibition *Encounters* (2005).

Before an explanation of the origins of the chart, it is important to understand a little

fated *Ridderschap van Holland*, a large merchant ship lost on the long voyage to the Indies. Arriving on the west coast of New Holland, Vlamingh found and named the Swan River and Rottneest Island and, on Dirk Hartog Island, he also discovered a pewter plate, inscribed by Hartog in 1606. Vlamingh left a plate of his own, on which he inscribed Hartog's words together with details of his own visit. Hartog's original plate is on permanent display in the Amsterdam Rijksmuseum, while Vlamingh's plate now resides in the Western Australian Maritime Museum in Perth.

Vlamingh found no evidence of the lost ship, and left within two months of sighting Rottneest Island. His subsequent reports to the VOC (Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, or Dutch East India Company as it is also known) were uniformly negative. The VOC was convinced that financial returns from Terra Australis would be hard won and, as a result, very few serious attempts were made to follow Vlamingh. Vlamingh's journal, first published in 1701 (a copy of which is held by the National Library), is replete with tales of distant fire smoke and footprints, abandoned camps and near contacts. The going was tough, the coast rough and unforgiving, fresh water hard to come by and, more importantly, there was little sign of trading opportunities, spices or other readily tradeable commodities.

Although there was no profit for the VOC, Vlamingh had charted the coast of the new continent, putting his cartographic skills to good use and describing the west

coast of the south land in greater detail and extent than any had achieved before. He charted perhaps 1500 kilometres of coast between the latitudes of 32.5 and 22.5 degrees. The southern chart starts at Rottneest and Perth and the second covers Dirk Hartog Island and Shark Bay. It was the last significant Dutch charting of New Holland. Such information, having potential commercial value (even though the VOC did not choose to take advantage of it), did not appear on printed charts for more than 50 years after

Vlamingh's expedition. By the time Gerard van Keulen's son Johannes published his father's chart, Cook was on the horizon, and the significance of Vlamingh's survey was lost in the decline of the VOC and the emergent fascination of the French and English with the east coast of Australia.

Our story of rediscovery resumes where Vlamingh's journey ends, in 1697, in the documentary traces of his expedition. There is no record of Vlamingh's return to the Netherlands, and the original Dutch manuscript of his journal is thought to be lost. More disappointing even than the missing journal, Vlamingh's original charting



has never been found and was possibly lost on the return to Batavia. Yet his cartographic efforts were not insignificant. Manuscript copies of Vlamingh's material, made soon after the expedition returned, retained important soundings and details that would prevent future stranding and loss. Vlamingh's charts were prized for their accuracy and remained unsurpassed until the surveys of Freycinet and Flinders (who acknowledged Vlamingh's role), some 120 years later.

The first inkling that a chart existed in another hand came to light in a sale catalogue from 1875, more than 100 years before Schilder's visit to the Library. The Amsterdam bookseller Frederik Muller offered for sale a nautical atlas by Gerard van Keulen, *Nieuwe groote lichtende zeefakkel* (New Great Shining Sea Atlas), which contained, apart from the usual number of printed charts, 74 manuscripts. The catalogue also included the following reference: 'For Australia there are very interesting 2 drawn and never printed maps of the coasts discovered there by Willem de Vlamingh, Jan and Febr. 1697, on which are annotated the places where he landed, his observations, etc'. As Schilder concluded in 1985, both charts must have been copies of Victorszoon's large outline chart though, as he observes, there is no reference to the purchaser.

Could the buyer have been Petherick? It is unlikely, otherwise

above:

Johannes van Keulen (1704–1755)  
*Het Westelykste Gedeelte van 't Land vande Eendragt of Nova Hollandia* 1753  
coloured map; 56.7 x 97.0 cm  
Map Collection  
nla.map-nk2111

Johannes van Keulen's published map of his father's manuscript is the first printed chart referring to Vlamingh's voyage. It is inscribed in Latin:

Here the Dutch lion sits and commands the vanquished Indians.  
He shakes out his mane and moves his golden neck.  
When he roars, the terrified kings lay aside their diadems, and the East itself gives up its treasures.  
For the ancients, the Ganges was the furthest limit or hope of things.  
How far behind do the Dutch now see India?

left:

Jacques Nicolas Bellin (1703–1772)  
*Carte reduite de la mer du Sud* 1764 (detail)  
coloured map; 19.9 x 33.5 cm  
Map Collection  
nla.map-nk1570

This map indicates a shift in the focus of exploration to the eastern limits of the new continent



why the de Graaff attribution written on the map? Further, although the Library has one or two single sheets from editions of the van Keulen *Zeefakkel*, it did not receive the atlas listed in Muller's catalogue with the Petherick Collection. It is more likely that Petherick picked the charts up in a subsequent sale, though how long afterwards we do not know.

By a strange coincidence, we do know that Petherick had the chart in 1895. Remarkably, a file detailing the transfer of Petherick's collection to the Library contains correspondence relating to our chart in which Mr R.W. Forsyth, of Collaroy, wrote to the Library on 15 June 1953, seeking a full size photostat reproduction of a manuscript chart that had been shown at the International Geographical Congress in London in 1895 (the report from the congress includes a listing for the chart). Within two days, Harold White had located and arranged for the copying of the chart in question, which he believed was drawn by the cartographer Isaac de Graaff (following Petherick's inscription).

While it would be difficult to advance the provenance of the chart any further, one more mystery remained to be solved. Manuscript charts are usually associated with first drafts rather than sheets of such polished quality as the van Keulen charts. Recent research into the van Keulen family business has, however, revealed a practice that has shed light on the origins of the Library's chart. In about 1704, Gerard van Keulen hit upon the idea of drawing

and embellishing famous, topical or otherwise notable charts to be included with atlases or sold to valued purchasers. The Vlamingh material was a prime candidate as there were just two manuscript charts in existence, explaining the 'the furthest limit or hope of things'. Van Keulen had access to the VOC archives by virtue of his relationship as supplier of instruments, maps and charts to the VOC fleet. It is now thought that the charts in the Library's possession were drawn by Gerard van Keulen from Victorszoon's manuscript chart.

These manuscript charts were typically quite large, hand-drawn in pen and coloured with decorative touches such as five-coloured compass roses and ornate calligraphy with numerous flourishes. They follow distinct formats and most were drawn on a relatively large scale, with many including inset sections of greater detail. The charts identified were produced in three sizes, with the Vlamingh sheets being drawn on the largest sized paper, 59 x 99 centimetres. The decoration on all 750 known charts is quite modest, and confined to an oval or rectangular framing (cartouche) of the title, imprint and scale bar, the colouring of land masses being generally an olive green. Many of the charts include text on the coastal or marine sections of the charts, though few to the degree that the Vlamingh chart does, with its lengthy banner text, relating to Victorszoon's profile drawings.

Of the van Keulen manuscripts documented, just three sheets are of the Australian coastline: the two held by the Library, and a third being a smaller chart of the northern coastline (held by the Nationaal Archief, The Hague). The great beauty of the Vlamingh chart is in its detail including the insets of Rottneest Island and Swan River, and 21 lines of manuscript text describing early European contact and impressions of the south land. Over a period of 25 years, van Keulen created an extensive archive of original works, covering all the coasts where the Dutch mariners were active. In the case of the Vlamingh discoveries, he created a rare artefact that is as alluring to us today as it was to Petherick more than 100 years ago.

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Gerard van Keulen (1678–1726)  
*T Zuijd landt ontdeckt door Willem de Vlamingh in den Maande van Jan an February 1697* (detail)  
[between 1697 and 1726]  
coloured manuscript map;  
57.0 x 96.8 cm  
Map Collection  
nla.map-rm751

The production of manuscript nautical charts over copper engraved compass lines was not unknown in the Dutch map-making tradition. Van Keulen, however, developed a systematic practice to supplement printed atlases for his valued clients. There can be little doubt the practice was an example of market innovation and was one more reason, in addition to the van Keulen stamp of cartographic excellence, that the firm was able to establish and maintain its position as the largest maritime cartographic firm in Europe.

