As part of National Archaeology Week
Thursday 25 May 2006, 5.00 p.m – 6.00 p.m.

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‘The Archaeological Remains of Dutch Indiamen in Early 17th Century’

Abstract

The majority of the Dutch East Indiamen dating to the late 16th and early 17th century were built with two layers of hull planking. Archaeological remains of Dutch double-planked ships dating to the late 16th and early 17th centuries AD, specifically the Scheurrak SOI (1580s), Nassau (1606), Mauritius (1609), Batavia (1629) and Avondster (1659) shipwrecks have attested the use of double planking. The practice of double planking has been interpreted as ‘experimental’. However, current study of archaeological remains and research of Dutch archival material from the early 17th century, such as ship journals, administrative documents from the Dutch East India Company, and other manuscripts, demonstrate convincingly that the practice of double planking the hull was not an experimental procedure. On the contrary, its practice was standard for the construction of East Indiamen in the first half of the 17th century.

The Scheurrak SOI ship, Nassau, Mauritius, Batavia and Avondster were large merchantmen with a double layer of oak hull planking, with each layer of approximately the same thickness. Batavia’s hull was double planked up to the sheer strake just below the gundeck. In addition, Nassau, Mauritius, Batavia, and Avondster carried a layer of thin pine planking or sheathing fastened with iron nails to the hull planking. This sheathing was fastened to the outer planking with large-headed iron nails, which were closely spaced in order to produce an iron rust layer protecting the hull against marine organisms. From a letter written by Jan Pieterzoons Coen on 10 November 1614, it is known that all ships in service of the Dutch East India Company in Jaccatra were sheathed with a layer of pine planking to protect the ships from excessive teredo worm damage.

The study of the archaeological data of Dutch shipwrecks and its comparison with historic documentation yields new information on Dutch shipbuilding practices, naval architecture, economy, and socio-political climate of early 17th-century Holland.

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Simmonds Lecture Theatre, Third General Purpose Building
5.00 – 6.00 p.m.