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The Rival Galleot

Port Fairy Discovery Ancient or Modern?

While learned members of the Royal Geographical Society have been endeavouring to discover the whereabouts of a supposed Spanish galleon, near Warrnambool, Mr W. J. James, a builder, at Brunswick, has discovered what he claims to be another galleon near Port Fairy.

The hull of the vessel is embedded in the sand in the sea, close to the beach, about 2½ miles east of the township, and Mr. James has determined to settle the question of its identity by salving the wreck. When the sunken vessel is walled around with sandbags, Mr James considers he will be able to clear out the sand with the aid of a powerful suction pump. He left yesterday for Port Fairy, and intends starting operations at once.

Mr. D. Le Souef, curator of the Zoological Gardens; Dr Horne, president of the Zoological Society; and Dr Anderson have also gone down to Port Fairy to examine an aboriginal kitchen [*word unreadable in the original article - possibly "midden"*] near the wreck, with a view of seeing whether it contains any Spanish relics. Some Spanish coins have previously been found in the district.

The operations at Port Fairy have aroused fresh interest regarding the position of the other wreck known as the "Spanish galleon," which is supposed to be 30 ft above sea level about six miles west of Warrnambool. It is thought by those who have investigated the subject that the vessel lies buried in the hummocks at the head of Rutledge's cutting, about three-quarters of a mile east of Gorman's Lane.

It was seen at various periods between 1841 till 1880, when it became buried beneath the shifting sands. Captain Mason, who saw it in 1846, said it had the appearance of a vessel of about 100 tons burthen, and "from its bleached and weatherbeaten appearance must have been there many years." The blacks said it had been "always there."

Mr George Gordon M'Crae, who is regarded as an authority on the subject, considers that the supposed galleon is one of the Dutch discovery ships which were in Australian waters for a period extending from 1605 to 1775. He recently received from the Royal Dutch Geographical Society at Amsterdam a thick volume dealing exhaustively with "The Part Borne by the Dutch in the Discovery of Australia." This shows that some of the vessels came along the south coast as far as Nuyt's Archipelago, and Mr M'Crae thinks it is not improbable that others, in attempting to get beyond this point, might have got out of their course and run ashore on the Victorian coast. Besides the bigger ships from Holland there were numerous Dutch galleots sent out from Java, and one of these, he thinks, might be identical with that buried in the hummocks. The operations of the Spanish ships, on the other hand, were confined to the northern part of the continent, and could hardly have reached the southern seas.

The interest is now concentrated on the Port Fairy discovery. Is it early Dutch or Spanish or later British?