

Shining a light on a dark corner of the nation's European history



Greg Ferguson during a night-time visit to the nation's oldest European building, on West Wallabi Island, off the West Australian coast

STEWART ALLEN

EXCLUSIVE

VICTORIA LAURIE

The dark history of the nation's oldest European building has been illuminated with dramatic night images of a humble stone ruin still standing on one of Australia's most remote islands.

Next year marks the 400th anniversary of the arrival on our shores of Dirk Hartog, the Dutchman who left behind Australia's first European artefact, an inscribed plate nailed to a post in 1616 near Shark Bay.

Thirteen years later, another Dutch ship met its fate further south on the perilous West Australian coast. The *Batavia* was shipwrecked on June 4 on reefs off Beacon Island, part of the Houtman-Abrolhos Island group, and

the survivors soon divided into two camps.

Mutineers led by the murderous Jeronimus Cornelisz stayed on Beacon Island while a resisting group of soldiers, led by Wiebbe Hayes, was exiled to die on West Wallabi Island.

Instead the castaways lived on seafood and drank rainwater from limestone sinks, and built themselves a stone shelter. On nearby islands, many *Batavia* survivors — about 125 men, women and children — would have their throats slit or succumb to illness before a rescue party arrived.

Passion for the *Batavia* story inspired photographer Stewart Allen and his friend Greg Ferguson to make five trips to the islands over three years. Their quest was to capture visually the air of doom and dark beauty hanging over the humble fortress on West Wallabi.



A cannon from the *Batavia* shipwreck; the scars left on coral by the ship are still visible

"It's the best shipwreck story in the world," Allen says. "The *Titanic* took five hours to sink but the *Batavia* story was three months of murder, rape and retribution. And it happened in a land-

scape totally foreign to European eyes. It must have been terrifying."

Packing cameras and torches into a small runabout, the pair waded through the same reefs that pierced the *Batavia's* hull nearly



four centuries ago. Working under a moonless, star-filled night sky, they used rapidly waved torches to "paint" the stone wall with light during 30-second camera exposures.



"We were running up and down with our torches, jumping over small wallabies that live on the island, and into potholes," Allen recalls.

"It was quite comical."

Hayes and his men stayed alive long enough to be rescued by the ship's commander, Francisco Pelsaert, who performed an incredible feat by sailing an open boat up to Indonesia and bringing back a rescue ship three months later.

Maritime expert Graeme Henderson, who at age 16 discovered his first coin-laden Dutch shipwreck along the same coast, says Dutch East India ships pioneered the fast southward route using the Roaring Forty winds.

The wrecks of more doomed ships await discovery in the region, he says, and funds from The Netherlands will support further maritime exploration. In the first half of next year, a team from the WA Maritime Museum will also revisit the Abrolhos Islands to update research done in the 1970s with ground-penetrating radar and GPS.

"The Dutch are incredibly interested in all this," says Henderson. "They recognise the importance of these maritime linkages between Dutch history and these places. It would be good if we valued them as highly."

Today, tourists fly over the spot where the *Batavia's* wooden hull once lay, a ghostly imprint in the coral-strewn shallows. Or visitors arrive by boat and walk around the ruin in daylight. But Allen and Ferguson faced a bigger challenge as they finished their photographic mission towards midnight.

"We got back to our anchorage in the dark, and unfortunately the craft had sprung a leak, which we didn't discover until the water was lapping around our ankles," Allen says. "So we improvised with buckets and reached our main boat in what you might call a semi-submersible state."

Adrenalin overload virtually assured

EXCLUSIVE

CHRIS GRIFFITH

The ability of virtual reality games to invoke severe adrenalin responses due to their realism may require new content classification, Sony Computer Entertainment says.

The Japanese electronics giant next year will start selling its virtual reality-based PlayStation VR headset globally. It and those of rivals will change the nature of gaming from controlling play displayed on a TV screen to wearing a headset and being inside the game.

But the instinctive adrenalin rush and fight-or-flight response users can experience when confronted with danger in their virtual world could be physically dangerous in the real world. This can happen despite a gamer obviously knowing it's only a game.

This reporter experienced a huge adrenalin rush when trying out *The Deep*, a virtual reality experience for the headset. In *The Deep*, the user is lowered under water on an enclosed platform. At first the experience is pleasant but later the scene darkens and a shark starts attacking and breaking up the platform.

The fact a user can virtually walk around the platform (by walking around in the real world) adds to the realism.

"I think classification for VR might need to include some warnings," Sony Computer Entertainment ANZ managing director Michael Ephraim said.

Sony is working with the Australian Classification Board on the issue. Mr Ephraim said Sony was aware of the need for VR content to meet standards in terms of warnings, which could mean different classifications.

Still, people must make responsible choices about what VR games they played. "People need to think about what they're doing in life, whether going on a roller coaster in a theme park to bungee jumping or watching a horror movie. They're not for the faint-hearted."

Classification of virtual reality-based computer games operates in the same way as for traditional computer games. But it is understood that if the immersive nature of the experience affects the impact of the game, this will be relevant to the ACB's assessment.

'Creator' of Bitcoin faced bankruptcy

EXCLUSIVE

LEO SHANAHAN

The man outed as a possible creator of the digital currency Bitcoin was at the centre of a bankruptcy dispute and had a restraining order issued against him after a dispute with a former employer.

Craig Wright, who was named by prominent IT magazines *Wired* and *Gizmodo* as being the possible creator of the online currency Bitcoin — and therefore potentially worth hundreds of millions of dollars — was issued with a bankruptcy notice for more than \$400,000 for debts in a liquidated company he was associated with in 2003.

The Weekend Australian can reveal that Mr Wright had a history of disputes with a former company he was associated with, which led to him having a restraining order issued against him, being found guilty of contempt of court and having the bankruptcy notice valued at \$425,000 issued against him.

Mr Wright avoided bankruptcy after settling with Sydney lawyer Chris McArdle.

Mr McArdle told *The Weekend Australian* yesterday he was shocked by the claims about Mr Wright's outing as the possible founder of the online currency, saying Mr Wright "existed within his own fantasy world".

"I don't know whether Craig Wright started Bitcoin, but I believe Craig Wright believes he started Bitcoin," Mr McArdle said.

The Australian IT entrepreneur and security expert was named by the magazines this week as the possible Bitcoin creator, a man previously only known by the pseudonym Satoshi Nakamoto.

There has been a worldwide hunt for the elusive Nakamoto since the launch of Bitcoin in January 2009. The currency has grown in value to be worth \$US5 billion.

This week Australian Tax-

ation Office officials accompanied by the Australian Federal Police executed a warrant at Mr Wright's Sydney home as part of an ongoing tax dispute associated with his companies.

The dispute with his former employer started when questions were raised by the company's former managing director and chief investor Mike Ryan about spending in the company in 2003 by Mr Wright, who was then head of development and services in Demorgan.

Mr Ryan came to an agreement with Mr Wright that he would not approach clients of the original company to join a new entity created by Mr Wright.

Mr Wright had a restraining order placed upon him but was found to have continued to have

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CHRIS MARDLE
LAWYER

approached clients and was found guilty of contempt of court and given a suspended 28-day jail sentence and ordered to do community service. Mr Ryan did not wish to comment on the speculation around Mr Wright being the creator of Bitcoin, but confirmed the legal action.

"For the record, we were successful in securing a restraining order against Wright and had him tried and convicted of contempt of court for actions he committed following his removal from the operations of Demorgan Information Security Systems Pty Ltd," Mr Ryan said.

Not long after the dispute Demorgan went into liquidation and the debt was bought from liquidators on 2006 by Mr McArdle, who was Mr Ryan's lawyer.

Mr McArdle has been chasing Mr Wright through the courts for the amount since 2006 which culminated in a bankruptcy notice being issued to Mr Wright for \$425,000. The pair settled in 2013 and Mr Wright avoided bankruptcy. Mr Wright has since started a series of IT companies, including several new companies called Demorgan.

In documents filed with ASIC Demorgan claims to have paid-up shareholdings valued at just over \$200 million.

Mr Wright has claimed in online profiles to possess a PhD and be an adjunct professor in computer science at Charles Sturt University.

Yesterday the Charles Sturt University issued a statement saying Mr Wright had been issued with three masters degrees from the university but no PhD. It is unclear whether Mr Wright possesses a PhD.

"Mr Wright has not been awarded a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) by CSU. Between May 2011 and May 2014 Mr Wright was an adjunct academic at CSU. Adjunct academics undertake unpaid academic work and are not formally employed by the university," the university said in a statement.

Mr Wright appears to have access to large amounts of Bitcoin, with a McGrathNicol administrators report into one of his companies, Hotwire, saying the company received \$30 million worth of equity "in paid-up capital and this was injected via Bitcoins".

The company reportedly claimed to be eligible for a \$54m rebate in R&D credits from the federal government for its research into supercomputers and cryptocurrency.

Cryptocurrency expert Ian Grigg, who claims to have been in contact with friends and family of Mr Wright, tweeted yesterday the entrepreneur had been the target of an extortion plot.

"For some time, CW has been victim of an extortion plot for money and other outrageous things," he tweeted.

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