

= Meermin (VOC ship) =

The Meermin (Dutch pronunciation : [?me?rm?n]) was an 18th @-@ century Dutch cargo ship of the hoeker type , one of many built and owned by the Dutch East India Company . She was laid down in 1759 and fitted out as a slave ship before her maiden voyage in 1761 , and her career was cut short by a mutiny of her cargo of Malagasy people . They had been sold to Dutch East India Company officials on Madagascar , to be used as company slaves in its Cape Colony in southern Africa . Half her crew and almost 30 Malagasy lost their lives in the mutiny ; the mutineers deliberately allowed the ship to drift aground off Struisbaai , now in South Africa , in March 1766 , and she broke up in situ . As of 2013 , archaeologists are searching for the Meermin 's remains .

= = Construction and use = =

The Meermin was laid down in 1759 in a shipyard belonging to the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oost @-@ Indische Compagnie , abbreviated to " VOC ") in the port of Amsterdam in the Netherlands . The Meermin was a 480 @-@ ton Dutch hoeker , square rigged with three masts .

The hoeker originated in the 15th century as a type of fishing vessel with one or two masts in response to the growing Dutch trade in herring , and was known in English as a hoy . Equipped with guns , hoekers were employed as defensive escorts for fishing fleets , or Buisconvoyers , in the Second Anglo @-@ Dutch War of the 1660s . They came to be used more widely in trade with the Dutch East Indies via the Cape of Good Hope in southern Africa , as their rounded sterns proved to be more resistant to warping and springing than square sterns , which were prone to " catastrophic leaking when exposed to strong sun . " Larger than most hoekers , the Meermin was unusual for her type in that she was built of oak and had a beakhead , a feature not normally present in smaller merchant vessels .

The Meermin was built for use as a slave ship in the VOC 's African trade ; between 1658 and 1799 the VOC acquired and transported 63 @,@ 000 slaves to its Cape Colony , now part of South Africa . The ship began her maiden voyage at Texel , an island off the coast of what is now the Netherlands , on 21 January 1761 , with a crew of 62 under the command of Captain Hendrik Worms ; she arrived at the Cape of Good Hope on 15 June . Although fitted out as a slave ship , vessels such as the Meermin routinely carried other goods when not transporting slaves .

= = Mutiny and destruction = =

From December 1765 , the Meermin was working the coastline of Madagascar , collecting Malagasy men , women and children for use as slaves in the Cape Colony , under Captain Gerrit Muller and a crew of 56 . Carrying about 140 Malagasy , she set sail from the north @-@ western coast of Madagascar on 20 January 1766 .

Two days into the voyage a " large party of [Malagasy] " was allowed on deck , the men to assist the crew , and the women to provide entertainment by dancing and singing . This was to prevent death and disease among the Malagasy , so avoiding loss of profit .

On 18 February 1766 , the ship 's supercargo ordered some assegais , or African spears , and some swords , to be brought on deck for the Malagasy to clean . When the weapons were clean and the Malagasy were ordered to return them , they attacked the ship 's crew , and took control of the ship . A truce ensued , the terms of which were that if the Malagasy would spare the lives of the remaining crew the ship would be sailed back to Madagascar , but taking advantage of the Malagasy 's lack of navigational skills , the crew instead set sail for the coast of southern Africa .

On sighting land , the crew persuaded the Malagasy that what they saw was a part of Madagascar the mutineers were unfamiliar with : after further subterfuge by the crew , the Malagasy set the Meermin to drift towards the shore at Struisbaai . But the sea was rough , and one of the ship 's masts was cut down to improve her balance . The Meermin eventually grounded on a sandbank , by which time a militia consisting of local farmers and burghers had been formed onshore , who had

observed that the ship was flying no flags , which they recognised as a distress signal . The militia killed or captured those of the Malagasy who ventured ashore , and then organised the removal into custody of all Malagasy remaining on the ship , under the command of a magistrate from Stellenbosch . The Meermin was assessed as beyond recovery , and left to break up where she grounded .

= = Salvage and archaeology = =

The VOC authorities salvaged as much as possible from the Meermin , recovering 286 muskets , 12 pistols , 5 bayonets , gunpowder , musket balls and compasses ; cables , ropes and other items from the ship were auctioned on the shore . The ship 's logbook has not survived .

In 2004 , Iziko Museums started a maritime archaeology project to find and recover the wreck of the Meermin , with supporting historical and archaeological research funded by the South African National Lottery .

Jaco Boshoff of Iziko Museums , who is in charge of the research , retrieved the Meermin 's plans from the Netherlands , to help identify this wreck among the numerous ships reputed to have run aground in the Struisbaai area . The search for the Meermin has employed an airborne magnetometer survey , as a marine magnetometer survey proved to be impractical owing to the shallowness of the waters . Magnetometer surveys can readily pick out wreck sites , as iron items from the ships can be detected by their recognisable signatures . Of 22 new , possible wrecks identified , 11 were identified as candidates for the wreck of the Meermin . Six are on what is now land , but have been ruled out as they are wrecks of pine @-@ built ships , whereas the Meermin was built of oak . In 2011 , the Iziko Museums ' travelling exhibition " Finding Meermin " included updates on the progress of Jaco Boshoff 's work with the archaeological research team . In November 2013 it was reported that , while the ship had not yet been found , lack of funding was holding up completion of the search , with four target areas remaining to be examined .