



Historic England

## Protected Wreck Sites



On 1st April 2015 the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England changed its common name from English Heritage to Historic England. We are now re-branding all our documents.

Although this document refers to English Heritage, it is still the Commission's current advice and guidance and will in due course be re-branded as Historic England.

[Please see our website](#) for up to date contact information, and further advice.

We welcome feedback to help improve this document, which will be periodically revised. Please email comments to [guidance@HistoricEngland.org.uk](mailto:guidance@HistoricEngland.org.uk)

We are the government's expert advisory service for England's historic environment. We give constructive advice to local authorities, owners and the public. We champion historic places helping people to understand, value and care for them, now and for the future.

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Heritage Protection

# Protected Wreck Sites

Moving towards a new way of managing  
England's historic environment

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ENGLISH HERITAGE

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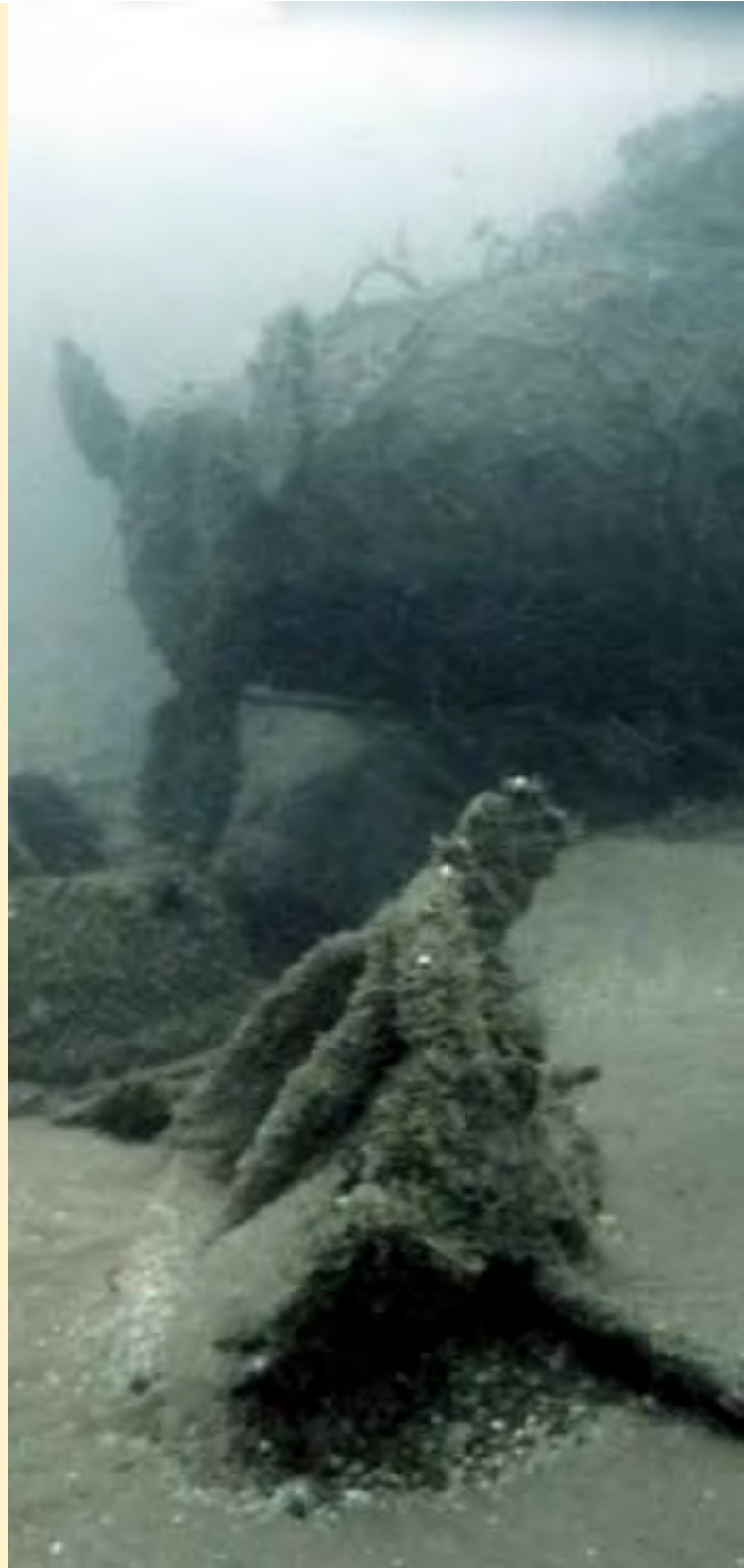
England's Protected Wreck Sites comprise the remains of the nation's most important historic wrecks and their contents

## What are England's Protected Wreck Sites?

*Designation* is the name given to the recognition of an historic wreck site under the heritage protection system in England. It is one form of statutory protection at a national level; the others are: Listing (for buildings and structures) and Scheduling (for monuments).

Wreck sites may contain the remains of vessels, their fittings, armaments, cargo and other associated objects and deposits. They may merit legal protection if they contribute significantly to our understanding of our maritime past on account of their historical, archaeological, or artistic importance. The Protection of Wrecks Act 1973 allows the Government to designate, by order, an important wreck site to prevent uncontrolled disturbance and English Heritage to develop research, education and access initiatives to raise awareness of, and encourage involvement in, these wreck sites.

The designated wrecks in England contain remains ranging from Middle Bronze Age cargoes to early submarines. English Heritage advises Government on designations and manages the licensing scheme that enables access to English sites.



▲ *Below left* The wreck of submarine *Holland No. 5* resting on the seabed.

▶ *Right* An archaeologist surveys the remains of the Swash Channel wreck to enable the site to be assessed against the criteria for designation.

A diver records rope found on the wreck of *HMS Invincible*.



## How are Historic Wrecks Chosen?

English Heritage recommends wreck sites and their contents or former contents for designation with great care. Wrecks or wreck sites may be considered to merit designation if they contribute or appear likely to contribute significantly to the understanding of the past on account of their historical, archaeological, or artistic importance in a national context. Such significance may be assessed on the basis of the following criteria which contribute to a wider judgement based on the individual circumstances of each case:

**Period:** In identifying sites to be protected, regard will be had to the currency of any particular wreck/vessel type and its representativeness.

**Rarity:** There are some wreck categories which, in certain periods are so scarce that all surviving examples which still retain some archaeological potential should be preserved.

**Documentation:** The significance of a wreck may be enhanced by close historic association with documented important historical events or people, or by the supporting evidence of contemporary records or representations.

**Group value:** The value of a single wreck may be greatly enhanced by its co-location with other similar vessels (for example at the site of a battle) or by its association with other contemporary features such as port facilities or defensive sites.

**Survival / Condition:** Assessments of survival should consider the degree of intactness of a wreck, the likelihood of the preservation of constructional and technological detail and the current condition of the remains.

**Fragility / Vulnerability:** Some vessel types are likely to be more fragile than others and the presence of commercially valuable objects within a wreck may make it particularly vulnerable. Vulnerable sites of this type would particularly benefit from protective designation.

**Diversity:** Consideration should be given both to the diversity of forms in which a particular vessel type may survive and to the diversity of surviving features.

**Potential:** On occasion, the nature of archaeological remains cannot be specified precisely but it still may be possible to document reasons anticipating their existence

and importance and so to demonstrate the justification for identifying a site for protection.

### Selection Guides

To supplement these broad criteria, English Heritage is developing a series of selection guides which set out in more detail our approaches to designating certain types of vessel. The following chronology is meant as a guide to assessment; the dates are indications of likely periods of interest and are not absolute:

- So little is known, and remains are so rare, from the period before 1500 AD that all examples are likely to be of special interest.
- Remains of boats and ship dating to between 1500 and 1815 are also rare; the majority of boats and ships dating from this period can be expected to be of special interest.
- As there are more examples of boats and ships from between 1815 and 1914, greater discrimination is warranted in determining which ones are of special interest. However, this period is also a time of massive change in how vessels were built and used; boats and ships that make a distinct contribution to understanding and appreciating this century should readily be regarded as having special interest.
- The highest volumes of known boats and ships lost in UK waters were casualties of WWI and WWII, with lesser numbers lost in the inter-war years. Greater discrimination will be required. Nonetheless, technological changes, the magnitude of events and the consequences locally and globally of activities in these years will clearly give rise to some boats and ships having special interest.
- The volume of boats and ships lost to archaeological contexts falls dramatically after 1945. A strong case will need to be made for boats and ships lost after 1945 to have special interest.

## How do wreck sites become protected?

Designation is a statutory process and wreck sites are assessed to define their significance with the greatest care.



◀ *Left to right*  
A diver investigates a D-Day Centaur tank on the sea bed.

Divers receive a pre-dive briefing before investigating a site

Those that are judged to be of historical, archaeological or artistic importance are designated by the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport under Section 1 of the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973.

## Who is involved?

There are a number of key bodies involved in the process:

**Department for Culture, Media and Sport:** The Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport is responsible for taking the decision to add, remove or change historic wreck designations.

**English Heritage:** We act as expert advisors to the Secretary of State, and will commission individual assessments for wreck sites and make recommendations to the DCMS.

**The Applicant:** Anyone may apply for an historic wreck to be designated on account of its historical, archaeological or artistic importance.

**The Owner:** Where identified, they will be notified and consulted as part of the process and any representations they make about the special interest of the site will be considered.

**Local Planning Authority:** Alongside the owner, they will usually be notified and consulted as part of the process particularly for intertidal sites.

**Marine Management Organisation:** They will be notified and consulted in relation to their planning, regulating and licensing functions in the marine area.

## Frequently asked questions

### How are wrecks protected?

Each designated wreck has an exclusion zone around it and it is an offence to tamper with, damage or remove any objects or part of the vessel, or to carry out any unauthorised activities within this restricted area. Administration of the 1973 Act, and the associated licensing scheme, is the responsibility of English Heritage in England, Historic Scotland in Scotland, Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments in Wales and the Environment and Heritage Service in Northern Ireland.

Section 2 of the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973 provides protection for wrecks that are designated as dangerous by virtue of their contents. Diving on these wrecks is strictly prohibited. This section of the Act is administered by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency through the Receiver of Wreck.

### What does protection mean?

A 'statutory instrument' identifies the location of the site and also the extent of the restricted area used to ensure the protection of the site. It is a criminal offence to do any of the following in a restricted area without a licence granted by the appropriate Secretary of State:

- Tamper with, damage or remove any part of a vessel lying wrecked on or in the seabed or any object formerly contained in such a vessel
- Carry out diving or salvage operations directed to the exploration of any wreck or to removing objects from it or from the seabed, or using equipment constructed or adapted for any purpose of diving or salvage operations. This is likely to include deployment of remotely operated vehicles
- Deposit anything including anchors and fishing gear which, if it were to fall on the site, would obliterate, obstruct access to or damage any part of the site.

### How can I apply for a wreck site to be protected?

Anyone may apply for an historic wreck site to be protected on account of its historical, artistic or archaeological importance (contact details are on the reverse of this leaflet).

### How can I access a Protected Wreck Site in English waters?

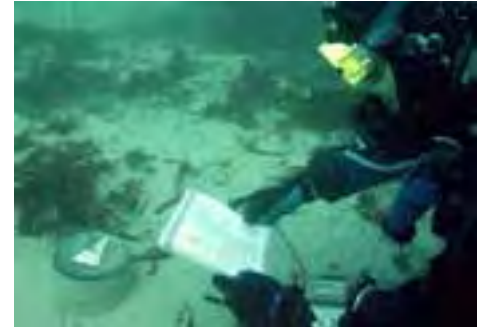
A licence issued by English Heritage on behalf of the Secretary of State is needed to access a designated wreck. Anyone may apply to English Heritage for a license to access a designated wreck. Licenses are issued on behalf of the Secretary of State.

### What are War Graves?

War Graves are more correctly known as Military Maritime Graves. In the UK, individual vessels and all crashed military aircraft are designated under the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986, administered by the Ministry of Defence.

► *Right* An archaeologist from Bournemouth University excavates the remains of the Swash Channel wreck.

A diver explores the wreck of HMS *Colossus* on the recently installed Diver Trail.



## Case Studies

### Case Study 1: London The Nore, Thames Estuary

The *London* was a Second Rate 'Large Ship' built in Chatham in 1654 during the Interregnum. She is known to have participated in the First Dutch War (1652-4) and later formed part of an English Squadron sent to collect Charles II from the Netherlands and restore him to his throne in an effort to end the anarchy which followed the death of Cromwell in 1658. The *London* blew-up on passage from Chatham in March 1665.

Two adjacent wreck sites (known respectively as the *London* and *King*) have been subject to archaeological assessment as part of ongoing investigations for the London Gateway project, River Thames.

### Case Study 2: Holland No. 5 Royal Sovereign Bank, off Bexhill, East Sussex

The *Holland No. 5* was the first commissioned submarine in the Royal Navy and was lost under tow in 1912. She was an experimental submarine, amongst the first ever to be built for the Royal Navy; completed in 1903 of steel with a petrol engine.

The submarine was discovered by a diver in 2000 and was designated as she is the only surviving example of this type of vessel on the seabed anywhere in the world.

In 2010 English Heritage received reports that the bow cap of the submarine was no longer present on the site. Current work is taking place to establish potential causes for its loss or removal. Possibilities identified so far include trawler damage, illegal diver removal or erosion. English Heritage is working to establish better management of the site.

Recently, access to the submarine has been led by the Nautical Archaeology Society.

### Case Study 3: Swash Channel Approaches to Poole Harbour, Poole Bay, off Dorset

Discovered during the investigation of an anomaly identified from geophysical survey work in advance of a channel deepening project, the wreck site has been initially interpreted as probably representing the remains of an armed merchantman, dated to the early seventeenth century.

Structural remains on the seabed suggest that a sizeable proportion of a large or very large vessel survives in substantial sections and that the quality of survival of some of the structural timber is very high.

Current investigations, including excavation, have been led by Bournemouth University.

### Case Study 4: HMS Colossus Southward Wells, off Samson Island, Isles of Scilly

This site comprises the stern section of the 1798 wreck of a British Third Rate Ship of the Line which stranded on Southward Wells on her voyage from Naples to Portsmouth with Etruscan pottery for Sir William Hamilton, and wounded soldiers. This wooden sailing warship was built in 1787 and the area of this site, comprising the hull and stern, has been designated since 2001.

The rear half of the port side of the vessel lies flat preserved in the sand. The wreck includes the six aftermost gun ports on the main gun deck, five of which still have 32 pound guns pointing through them, with their breech ends uppermost. The ship's structure appears to be complete from the top of the gun ports on the upper gun deck down to the turn of the bilge well below the waterline.

In May 2009, a dive trail was added to the wreck which facilitates guided tours between underwater observation stations.

For further information on applying to designate an historic wreck site, contact the relevant Heritage Protection Department in your area. The application form and guidance notes are also available on the English Heritage website.

For applications to access England's Protected Wreck sites, contact: English Heritage, Fort Cumberland, Fort Cumberland Road, Eastney, Portsmouth PO4 9LD. Telephone: 023 9285 6735, Email: [maritime@english-heritage.org.uk](mailto:maritime@english-heritage.org.uk)

The application form and guidance notes are also available on the English Heritage website.

Both English Heritage and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) have further information on historic wreck sites on their websites.

[www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)

[www.culture.gov.uk](http://www.culture.gov.uk)

## Contact and application information

### East of England and East Midlands

For the East of England (Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk, Suffolk) and the East Midlands (Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire, Rutland), contact:

#### Heritage Protection – East Territory

English Heritage  
Brooklands, 24 Brooklands Avenue  
Cambridge, CB2 8BU

Telephone: 01223 582700

Email: [ApplicationsEast@english-heritage.org.uk](mailto:ApplicationsEast@english-heritage.org.uk)

### North East, North West and Yorkshire and Humber

For the North East (County Durham, Northumberland, Tyne & Wear, Cleveland), the North West (Cheshire, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Merseyside) and Yorkshire and the Humber (East Riding of Yorkshire, North East Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire, North Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire), contact:

#### Heritage Protection – North Territory

English Heritage  
37 Tanner Row  
York, YO1 6WP

Telephone: 01904 601901

Email: [ApplicationsNorth@english-heritage.org.uk](mailto:ApplicationsNorth@english-heritage.org.uk)

### South West and West Midlands

For the South West (Bristol, Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Somerset, Wiltshire) and the West Midlands (Herefordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, West Midlands, Worcestershire), contact:

#### Heritage Protection – West Territory

English Heritage  
29 Queen Square  
Bristol, BS1 4ND

Telephone: 0117 9750 700

Email: [ApplicationsWest@english-heritage.org.uk](mailto:ApplicationsWest@english-heritage.org.uk)

### London and the South East

For London and the South East (Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Kent, Oxfordshire, Surrey, East and West Sussex), contact:

#### Heritage Protection – South Territory

English Heritage  
1 Waterhouse Square  
138-142 Holborn  
London, EC1N 2ST

Telephone: 020 7973 3000

Email: [ApplicationsSouth@english-heritage.org.uk](mailto:ApplicationsSouth@english-heritage.org.uk)

For copies of this leaflet, or if you would like this document in a different format, please contact our Customer Services Department:

Telephone: 0870 333 1181

Fax: 01793 414926

Textphone: 01793 414878

Email: [customers@english-heritage.org.uk](mailto:customers@english-heritage.org.uk)

### Freedom of Information

English Heritage is subject to the Freedom of Information Act. All information held by the organisation will be accessible in response to a Freedom of Information request, unless one of the exemptions in the Act applies.

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Photograph of Centaur tank © Martin Davies

Photograph of divers receiving briefing on boat © HWTMA

Photograph of diver with hose © Bournemouth University

Photograph of HMS *Colossus* © Kevin Camidge

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Front cover photograph:

A merman's head carving on a rudder of a wreck in the Swash Channel

© Bournemouth University



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