

UNDERWATER CULTURAL HERITAGE – UK IS FAILING IN ITS OBLIGATIONS

A view from the Maritime Archaeology Sea Trust by Jessica Berry – CEO, VAdm Sir Anthony Dymock – Trustee

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- Protecting our UCH and naval remains are both matters of national and international honour. It is also a matter bearing on current Defence policy “We will remember them” rings pretty hollow otherwise to current members of the Armed Forces, who have been recently been called upon to risk identical sacrifices.
- These activities also present a significant economic risk to the UK. The clean-up costs of unauthorised recovery causes further oil leaks eg. on HMS PRINCE OF WALES and HMS REPULSE, sunk in the now Malaysian EEZ, is estimated at £60m for a major oil leak.
- The problem is increasing: damage and depredation in the North Sea with the Battle of Jutland wrecks and WW1 submarines is a current scandal close to home, HMS EXETER and the Battle of Java Sea (1942) events represent the thin end of the global wedge (note wholesale looting of her and removal of bodies to shallow graves in Indonesia); technology is making deep and distant wreck sites more accessible to the bad guys but conversely it also making surveillance of such wrecks far more feasible.. There are 4805 naval wrecks all around the world (according to MAST’s RN loss List).
- MAST/NMRN’s joint initiative on protecting and managing the UK RN’s naval remains, begun in October 2017 with a private meeting of senior civil servants, law enforcement and intelligence officials at Admiralty House, has begun to gain traction.
- There is technology now available for the good guys to improve monitoring, deterrence and enforcement – given the political will. Action need not be expensive. (Previously this technology was only available to the military.)
- There is a huge inconsistency between the way we treat “Tommyes” and “Jack”. A problem we share with other members of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and close Allies like The Netherlands. (The Netherlands is currently embroiled in a growing controversy regarding the looting of HMS E3 and HMS E5 both in Dutch territorial waters. The submarines are Sovereign Immune and thus protected according to Article 4 of the International Convention on Salvage 1989 under which vessels are not allowed to be touched without Flag State (the UK) consent.)
- This a good opportunity for the UK to show International leadership on a subject that is not just economic or transactional.
- Protecting the remains of relatives resonates powerfully at community level, reflects well on those engaged – official and political - and can foster cross-party support.
- So far the scandal of uncontrolled pillage of our naval remains has been relatively low key but the potential exists for it to flare up more seriously, as it is beginning to do so. Despite



BREXIT, and perhaps as a patriotic antidote, politicians and officials will wish to have some active initiatives and prevention measures to point to.

Possible Initiatives

- Parliamentary group- starting with naval port MPs with expert advice from the heritage sector
- Review and refresh current policy, procedures and codes of conduct
- Take advantage of UK Space Catapult Initiatives
- Support and encourage intelligence led operations through National Maritime Information [formerly "Intelligence"] Centre (NMIC)
- Support improved coordination through JNAPC, Project HUGINN etc
- Ensure UCH protection becomes a regular agenda item in international naval and coastguard forums – CHENS (EU), CHANCOM (NATO), Arctic, North Atlantic and North Sea Coastguard forums

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