

Inquiry into the Welsh Government's Historic Environment Policy
Response from The Society for Nautical Research

The Society for Nautical Research

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WELSH ASSEMBLY

COMMUNITIES, EQUALITY AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE **INQUIRY INTO THE WELSH GOVERNMENT'S HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT POLICY**

WRITTEN EVIDENCE BY THE SOCIETY FOR NAUTICAL RESEARCH

The key points in this submission are that :

- the Advisory Committee on National Historic Ships has done invaluable work and its key functions and funding under its reclassified status as 'National Historic Ships UK', an independent UK Government sponsored body need to be retained. The Welsh Government should support its functions as part of its commitment to identifying, recording and explaining the maritime heritage of Wales
- the Welsh Government should respond positively to the forthcoming invitation for a representative for Wales to sit on the Council for National Historic Ships – UK, which is in the process of being appointed as a source of expertise and advice on all matters relating to historic vessels throughout the UK
- the Welsh Government can facilitate maritime conservation by signalling its national value. This should help unlock purse strings in the private sector
- a settled policy on the management and exploitation of historically significant wrecks or other underwater archaeological sites is needed. As part of this, earlier decisions that the UK should not sign the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage should be revisited. CADW's powers as respects the underwater heritage should be extended out to 200 miles or median lines
- it is important to scholarship that reductions in funding do not reduce the standards of care by which archive material is preserved and that access to archives for research and study is not reduced
- many invaluable historic records have come down to us despite the vicissitudes of history. Their maintenance is essential. We believe that it is essential that the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales should not be abolished. It is extremely useful as a body of record. Transfer of its functions to CADW would be a retrograde step. We believe that CADW officers will not be allowed to see key historic monuments because there will be confusion at any particular point in time whether they are on a site for the beneficial purpose of accessing a historic document or for the far less popular, though no doubt necessary, function of examining a monument. There needs to be a separation of functions so that the Inspectorial function of structures does not outweigh the benign function of examining historic records
- we doubt whether the amalgamation of the functions of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales with CADW will produce any worthwhile savings in money terms.

INTRODUCTION

1. This written evidence is submitted on behalf of the Society for Nautical Research.

THE SOCIETY FOR NAUTICAL RESEARCH

2. The Society for Nautical Research is a company limited by guarantee. It is also a Charity and by a Charity Commissioners' Scheme is the Trustee of the Save the Victory Fund and the Macpherson Collection Endowment Fund. The object of the Save the Victory Fund is to assist in the maintenance, upkeep and presentation of HMS Victory. The object of the Macpherson Fund is to augment the Macpherson Collection held by the Trustees of the National Maritime Museum and to assist in the maintenance and exhibition of this collection.

3. The Society for Nautical Research was founded in 1910 to foster the study of ships and seafaring throughout all ages and in all seas. Its membership is drawn from the whole of the British Isles as well as internationally and in addition to personal members in Wales includes the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff and University College of Wales. Membership is open to all. Its refereed journal, *The Mariner's Mirror*, is recognised internationally as the pre-eminent English language journal on naval and maritime history, nautical archaeology and all aspects of seafaring and lore of the sea world wide and in all ages. It publishes from time to time on Welsh maritime topics.

4. In the 100 years of its existence the Society has had practical experience of ship and boat conservation as well as the display of artefacts to museum standards. It has done so when the only funding for such activities had to come from private sources and it has done so when public funding was available; though it must be remarked that funding for nautical purposes always seems much harder to come by than funding for shore based purposes. Perhaps as a consequence there is a plenitude of country houses and a relative scarcity of maritime artefacts. Indeed, the maritime artefacts do not yet tell the story of the maritime power that was the United Kingdom and neither do they represent the modern reality that in excess of 90% of the country's trade is still carried by sea. For Wales there is very little understanding of the significance to the Welsh economy of the sea borne trades that took Welsh vessels all around the world.

NATIONAL HISTORIC SHIPS UK (formerly the Advisory Committee on Historic Ships)

5. In the few years of its existence National Historic Ships UK (NHS-UK) has placed over 1,000 vessels on the National Register of Historic Vessels (NRVH) and some 500 vessels on the National Archive of Historic Vessels (NAVH). The NAVH includes the National Historic Fleet being some 200 vessels of national significance to England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales spanning the spectrum of UK maritime history. (The National Maritime Museum, Cornwall has followed this lead and created and maintains the National Small Boat Register.) We urge the Welsh Assembly Government to work closely with National Historic Ships UK to ensure that the historic vessels in Wales are fully represented in the NRVH and NAVH and recently established UK replica list.

6. But National Historic Ships (UK) has done much more than make lists. It has, for example, intervened to prevent the demolition of the clipper ship CITY OF ADELAIDE and is now working with the Scottish Government to find a conservation solution in the light of the fact that the Scottish Maritime Museum can no longer afford to maintain her or afford the space that she occupies. (It seems likely that a long term solution that will save this important Australian emigrant ship will be in place before too much longer.)

7. Alongside its Sustainability Grants programme to encourage vessel conservation, National Historic Ships (UK) has launched the *Shipsape Network*. This is a national initiative to develop regional networks of skills, suppliers (including an online directory of skills and services) and to act as a base for training initiatives. *Shipsape Bristol Channel*

and *Shipshape Mersey*, which both have relevance to Welsh maritime history, are already operating and the network is in the process of being expanded. The Welsh Government should explore further co-operation with National Historic Ships (UK) across all its activities and should bear in mind the need for support for historic vessels in Wales giving due consideration to working with NHS-UK to establish a dedicated Shipshape Network for Wales. It would assist considerably if the Welsh Government could clarify exactly which bodies in Wales were responsible for maritime conservation and increasing the public awareness of maritime heritage. Is it the National Museum, is it CADW or is it some other organisation? Clarity on this point could lead to resurgence in Wales of the knowledge of the historic role of shipping and maritime activity in the economic development of Wales.

8. Perhaps a clear duty should be imposed on CADW to require it to address conservation matters relating to maritime history as it does land based matters? CADW should, of course, be funded in accordance with new burdens rules so that it can carry out all additional work that the Welsh Assembly Government may give to it. The majority of maritime sites in Wales are its responsibility but we wonder just how well it is equipped to deliver on its responsibilities? Protection of the wreck site of the *Resurgum* off Rhyl is an example where additional effort appears to be needed.

9. By signalling the national importance of vessel and, indeed, maritime conservation in general in this way the Welsh Government would be helping to unlock partnership funding. The Welsh Government could further contribute at very little cost by explaining the value of maritime heritage to the public at large. For whatever reasons, all the countries within the United Kingdom nowadays seem disconnected from their maritime or industrial heritage. Because of this disconnection voluntary donations are harder to come by than is desirable; and significant philanthropic donations are even scarcer. Signs of Government interest in this work would help to secure funding from charitable and private sector sources. Donors would be much more aware that they are helping a necessary cause including maintaining scarce skills and thus employment. Downstream they are also helping to develop and maintain new businesses based on income from visitors. And in their turn additional tourist destinations boost the economy more generally.

SHIP CONSERVATION

10. With grant aid from the Society for Nautical Research and the Headley Trust, the Advisory Committee on National Historic Ships published in 2010 the UK's definitive conservation manual on the principles of ship conservation. This has subsequently been recognised as setting international principles and standards for historic vessel conservation.

11. It must be said that ship conservation whether of a wooden hull or an iron or steel hull is far from easy. Firstly ships are large and they are expensive to rescue, restore and conserve. Secondly they are designed for their weight to be carried on water and so are subjected to many fewer unintentional stresses when afloat than in a dry dock. Their design purpose, whether for a naval vessel or a merchant vessel, was very specific and as such rarely lends itself to conservation in a form where they can easily be used for another purpose which will bring in significant sums of money to help with their conservation. But a sympathetic display well illustrated and told with ancillary attractions on offer will bring in significant revenue. This has been demonstrated at Bristol, for example, through the ground-breaking and highly successful SS Great Britain project.

12. The recent announcement of the opening later this year of a new, and we believe, privately funded, Museum in Cardiff dedicated to boats is welcome. Presumably this will complement in some way the National Waterfront Museum at Swansea? But CADW and the Welsh Assembly Government should consider how they might provide support and facilities to display one or more ships of significance to Wales rather than relatively small boats.

13. Display of any boat or vessel provides its own problems. For large vessels in particular the need is for a body of water accessible by sea and by land and near to centres

of population that can and will visit and contribute through admission charges. There are many bodies of water suitable; but with notable exceptions few are situated in parts of a dockland area that many would choose to visit – though a well featured vessel may turn out to be the key to strategic development of a rundown area. That there is a real interest and demand to see well displayed vessels and related artefacts in sympathetic surroundings.

NATIONAL LOTTERY FUNDS

14. The decline in funding from private sources has in some ways been offset by the availability in the last 20 years or so of funding from the National Lottery particularly through the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), which under revised arrangements with Camelot and government will be receiving significant increases in its funds from the Lottery. The lottery clearly appeals to the public and taps a funding source not otherwise available. As far as the Society is aware, match funding has always been secured for any project for which lottery funds have been pledged – as was the case with the Newport ship. One of the aims of the Welsh Government is, of course, to simplify governance and make it more cost effective and cost conscious. As already noted above, clear signs that the Government regards maritime conservation activities as being of importance would help to guide additional private sector match funding into maritime conservation.

HISTORIC WRECK SITES

15. In the light of the difficulties that DCMS in London encountered in developing a policy to manage the recently discovered 1744 wreck site of Admiral Balchin's HMS VICTORY because it lies outside the 12 mile Territorial Sea, English Heritage's jurisdiction and the scope of the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973 needs to be extended out from the breadth of the Territorial Sea to the further limit of the UK's 200 mile economic zone (or to median lines with adjacent countries). In Wales it would seem appropriate to follow recent changes to fisheries legislation and to extend CADW's powers out to 200 miles or median lines. This would enable full protection to be given to all maritime artefacts in the Irish Sea, for example, through the concerted efforts of the devolved administrations of the United Kingdom and the Isle of Man and the Republic of Ireland.

16. It is important that the United Kingdom has a coherent policy on the management and exploitation of historically important wreck sites and other items of archaeological significance that may be discovered underwater. As part of developing this policy, earlier decisions that the UK should not sign the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage should, perhaps, be revisited but in the knowledge that there is a greater role for the knowledgeable amateur diver to play than UNESCO seems to recognise and that not all sites are best served by leaving them untouched. The marine environment is harsh and natural changes in it may lead to rapid deterioration of sites and artefacts that have apparently been 'safe' for years.

MARITIME ARCHIVES

17. Maritime archives are to be found in nearly all the Museums and in many private collections. It is crucial to the development of scholarship and education in Wales that the skills of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales are not lost. Transferring their functions to CADW is not in our opinion a satisfactory solution. The personal knowledge and skills of the Commissioners will inevitably be lost and this breadth and depth of knowledge is unlikely to be replaced fully by bought in services. It is important that historic documents wherever they are archived can be accessed by representatives of a body charged with their safeguarding and by individuals who have the skills to handle them properly. Brigading this work with the inspection functions of CADW is not in our view likely to work smoothly not least because private individuals are not likely to welcome 'inspection' by CADW and indeed may make such inspection an expensive exercise by demanding sight of powers of entry and their proper and limited use. On the other hand experience shows

that representatives of the Royal Commission are usually welcomed and welcome to study historic documents in private possession.

THE COMMITTEES' CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

18. The Committee posed 5 consultation questions. The Society can answer as follows :

- Q How appropriate and successful are the current systems employed by the Welsh Government in protecting and managing the historic environment in Wales?

A From the maritime point of view the effort as between the land based historic environment and the maritime based historic environment appears to be unbalanced. The significance of the historic maritime environment is being forgotten if not yet lost.

- Q How well do the Welsh Government's policies promote the historic environment in Wales (for instance, in terms of interpretation, accessibility, attracting new audiences and tourism)?

A The importance of the maritime historic environment in Wales and the contribution that it has made in past centuries appears to be very little understood and is certainly not highly visible. Whilst the open air Museum at St Fagans provides a wonderful experience for all those interested in Welsh life – this is land based life. A similar maritime attraction, i.e. one more wide ranging than what has so far been possible at Swansea, would surely be of great value and help in many ways ranging from regeneration of an appropriate dock site through providing a learning experience about Wales, its maritime history and the economic importance of that history and on to a significant increase in income from the tourism sector.

- Q How well do the policies for the historic environment tie in with wider Welsh Government policy objectives (such as regeneration of communities)?

A The restoration and then display of an historic Welsh vessel or vessels could be used as the key to strategic re development of a rundown area. *Trincomalee* at Hartlepool is fulfilling that function.

- Q What would be the advantages and disadvantages of merging the functions of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales with the function of other organisations, including CADW?

A We have not seen any calculations of the anticipated savings from merging the functions of the Royal Commission and CADW. We have concerns, though, that the merger of functions into one official at operational level may mean that both the ancient monument functions and the historic document functions will receive less attention. In addition the skills and knowledge of Her Majesty's Commissioners would be lost. They could only be replaced by buying in consultancy services at probably a high cost. And such services are not likely to supply either the depth or breadth of knowledge that the Commissioners provide from their personal knowledge and experience.

- Q What role do local authorities and third sector organisations play in implementing the Welsh Government's historic environment policy and what support do they receive in this respect?

A The Society has no practical experience of this interplay.

P. D. Winterbottom
Honorary Secretary

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