

Bringing the Wet Stuff to a Sofa Near You

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Affiliated Volunteers with Devon and Cornwall Police Marine Support Unit Image credit: MSDS Marine

So much stuff to care for!

Our island enjoys a long maritime history and it is important for all of us to help preserve and protect our shared maritime cultural heritage. The National Listing and Marine Team at Historic England is dedicated to that goal and ensuring that the stories of each nationally important shipwreck in English waters continues to be told to future generations.



The resource that our country potentially cares for consists of some 36, 000 known wreck sites and recorded losses but only a small proportion of these has attracted special protection through legislation. We have produced guides, 'Introduction to Heritage Assets'¹ that reflect the range of sites, from the Bronze Age to modern times but most of these sites are out of site and accessible to relatively few, who have the required permissions, to enable them to visit the sites.

Image credit: Historic England

¹ The IHA can be accessed here: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/selection-criteria/wreck-selection/>

Where does the protection come from?

Some 57 of our nationally important shipwrecks are granted the highest level of protection sites due of their archaeological, historic, artistic or national importance. Sites may be considered by the Secretary of State, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, to merit designation if they contribute or contribute significantly our shared understanding of the past. The legislation to protect our underwater cultural heritage is the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973 which gives the highest level of protection and the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 which protects a wreck site by scheduling. There is also legislation that is enacted by the Ministry of Defence that relates to military war graves at sea - the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986.

Where does the legislation apply?

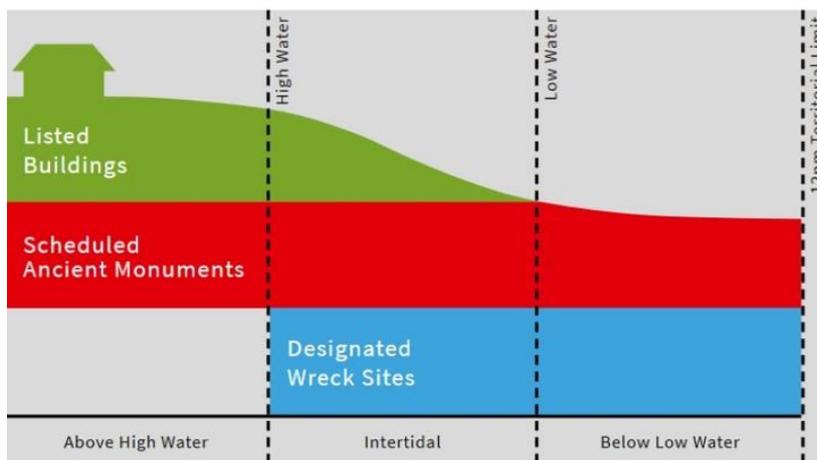


Image credit: Historic England

Protection of Wrecks Act 1973

The Protection of Wrecks Act 1973 provides a designated area around a protected wreck site and prohibits certain activities, within that area, unless authorised, by a licence, that permits those activities. The licensing system that permits public access to protected sites is managed by the Maritime Archaeologist, National Listing and Marine Team, on behalf of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. There are currently 57 Protected Wrecks in English Territorial waters and there is guidance available on how to access England's Protected Wreck Sites ²



Image credit: Historic England

² Accessing England's Protected Wreck Sites <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/accessing-englands-protected-wreck-sites-guidance-notes/>

The Protected Wreck licensees and their teams are custodians of our nationally important sites and are vital in helping us to ensure the condition of protected wreck sites are regularly monitored and artefacts recorded. They report to Historic England and their efforts are recognised through the Affiliated Volunteer Scheme. They form the largest group of volunteers that work with us to do this very important work.

The Protection of Wrecks Act 1973 celebrated its 50th Anniversary last year and to mark this occasion Historic England commissioned a number of projects. One of these involved making a film about the Act and why it's so important and to showcase the work of our volunteers. This film, 'PWA50: Diving into History' has been nominated for a number of awards at various film festivals and recently received the following recognition:

- *Honorable Mention for Cinematography*
- *Special Mention by Jury: Portrayal Public Participation in Cultural Resources Management*

at The Archaeology Channel International Film Festival, Oregon 2024³.

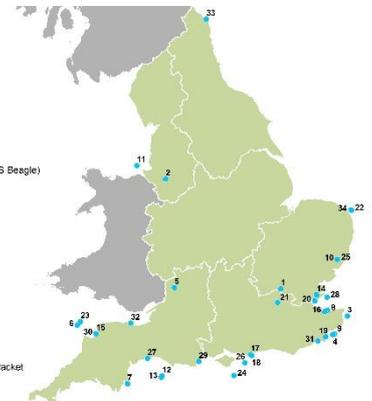
Watch our Protected Wreck film here –



Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979

This legislation relates to the scheduling of sites that are nationally important. In recent years, we have been applying this means of protection more widely to our maritime cultural heritage. This is because access to these sites is not as restrictive as wreck sites designated under the 1973 Act. They are still nationally important, but scheduling a wreck site allows recreational divers to dive it and takes into account the location, nature of the site and artefacts that might be present. Certain activities may require additional consents.

- 1) Barges at Waltham Gunpowder Works
- 2) Dorobury
- 3) GAD 23
- 4) Grosser Kurfurt
- 5) Hamnett
- 6) HMS Montagu
- 7) HMSm D 1
- 8) Intertidal Wreck at Tankerton Beach
- 9) Josephine Wilts
- 10) Lady Alice Kenlis
- 11) Lilla
- 12) LST-507
- 13) LST-531
- 14) Mud Berth for CGWW No. 7 (formerly HMS Beagle)
- 15) Northam Burrows
- 16) Old Brig
- 17) Phoenix Caisson (Inner)
- 18) Phoenix Caisson (Outer)
- 19) Phoenix Caisson (Littlestone-on-Sea)
- 20) Phoenix Caisson (Shoebury Ness)
- 21) Roman Riverboat
- 22) Seagull
- 23) South Australian
- 24) SS Faith
- 25) Sutton Hood
- 26) Tanks & Bulldozers
- 27) The Aye Boat
- 28) Unidentified Wreck: Thames Estuary
- 29) Valentine Tank Assemblage
- 30) Westland Hill
- 31) Wooden Wreck on Camber Sands
- 32) Wreck at Minehead, possibly the Bristol Packet
- 33) Wreck ENE of Bamburgh Castle
- 34) Xanthe



List of Scheduled Wreck Sites

Image credit: Historic England

³ #PWA50: Diving into History

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bwrlmoJs20&list=PLIGxgCwrLePDhdyIKDMckos4gK7gWQysp>

The Historic Environment is a shared resource

We believe that everyone should be able to enjoy the historic environment that surrounds them and participate in sustaining the historic environment. These values are set out in our Conservation Principles, Policies and guidance ⁴



Wheel Wreck Image credit: CSMAS

How then can someone, not a licensee or diver enjoy the wonder of a shipwreck?

We have created a library of virtual dive trails that can be easily accessed from any device that has access to the internet. There are currently 17 virtual dive trails available, ranging from wooden sailing ships to a First World War Submarine, that can be explored at your leisure and you can become lost in their stories.⁵

How can I get more involved with our wrecks?



Seaton Carew Protected Wreck 3D image

Image credit: Tees Archaeology

Whilst it is true that the majority of our nationally important sites are only accessible to divers, there are a number of sites that sit in the intertidal zone and are therefore reached more easily.

⁴Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/conservation-principles-sustainable-management-historic-environment/conservationprinciplespoliciesandguidanceapril08web/>

⁵ Virtual Dive Trails <https://historicengland.org.uk/campaigns/visit/protected-wrecks/virtual-dive-trails/>

These include *Seaton Carew*, *Tankerton Bay*, *Old Brig* at Seasalter, and *Amsterdam*. Please remember that access to a wreck, protected by the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973, is only permitted with a licence, issued by Department for Culture, Media and Sport. This system is administered by Historic England on behalf of DCMS and is not difficult to negotiate. It is free to apply and details of how to become a licensee are to be found on the Historic England's website.⁶



Tankerton Bay Wreck

Image credit: Wessex Archaeology



Wreck of the Amsterdam

Image credit: J. Gawronski

Our licensees are encouraged to become members of the Protected Wreck Association⁷ which has created a community where its members can cooperate and collaborate in the investigation, preservation and protection of our underwater cultural heritage.

Where can I get training in Foreshore and Underwater Archaeology?

There are several ways to enter into the world of 'wet stuff' and these could include volunteering to join one of our licensee teams and participate in the work that they do. This can be done by contacting the National Listing and Marine Team direct and we can forward your details to the licensees and help you to make contact with them; joining your local Archaeological Society, who may have ongoing or pending projects relating to maritime or underwater sites. A long established and trusted route is participating in the training programme offered by Nautical Archaeology Society.⁸ The society is based at Fort Cumberland, Portsmouth and offers a wide range of training courses, both online and in person, from foreshore archaeological skills, underwater archaeological skills, project management, cannon recording, photogrammetry, archives and diving protected wrecks as part of their protected wreck days activities; they also have their own dive club.

⁶ Applying for a licence <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/planning/consents/protected-wreck-sites/applying-for-licensing/>

⁷ Protected Wreck Association <https://protectedwrecks.org.uk/members-area/site-security/>

⁸ Nautical Archaeology Society <https://www.nauticalarchaeologysociety.org/>



Divers measuring cannon on the Chesil Beach Protected Wreck

Image credit: Nautical Archaeology Society



Diver investigating seabed during a site assessment

Image credit: MSDS Marine Ltd

The National Listing and Marine Team at Historic England is dedicated to the preservation and protection of our country's maritime cultural heritage. The scale of the work is reflected in the size of the resource that exists around our shores and only a fraction of that resource has some degree of protection. It would not be possible to do the work required of us without the passion, dedication and enthusiasm of our licensees and their teams, the support of our partners in tackling heritage crime and our friends and colleagues within the Heritage Sector. The hope is that you will be able to discover more about our nationally important wreck sites by visiting the links in this article and perhaps be encouraged to become actively involved in projects relating to the 'wet stuff'.

To discover more about our nationally important wrecks visit the National Heritage List for England

[here](#)

Contact us:

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