

THE ARCHAEOLOGY FORUM

a grouping of independent bodies concerned with archaeology

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Annabel Houghton
The Culture Team,
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30 June 2010

Dear Annabel,

Public Consultation on HMS Victory 1744: Options for the Management of the Wreck Site

The Archaeology Forum is a grouping of the key, non-governmental organisations concerned with archaeology in the UK. Its members include the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers UK, the Council for British Archaeology, the Institute of Conservation, the Institute for Archaeologists, the Institute of Conservation, the National Trust, the National Trust for Scotland, the Nautical Archaeology Society, Rescue, the Society of Antiquaries of London, the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, the Federation of Archaeological Managers and Employers, and the Society of Museum Archaeologists UK.

The Archaeology Forum is pleased to have the opportunity to comment on this consultation. It commends this initiative by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to promote a public debate about the future management of the HMS Victory 1744 wreck and the principles that should govern the protection of historic wrecks in general, in territorial waters and beyond.

The Forum fully supports the approach that DCMS, and the Ministry of Defence, are taking to ensure that the treatment of the wreck is consistent with the guidelines for good practice set out in the Annex to the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage 2001 (adopted by the UK government in 2005) and the

management approach for Designated wreck sites within UK waters. Given its historical and archaeological interest, the wreck of HMS Victory 1744 would have merited designation for its protection, we believe, had it been located within UK waters.

In response to the consultation questions:

Question 1: What are your views on the options for management of the wreck site in the light of the evaluation produced by Wessex Archaeology?

The evaluation work carried out by Wessex Archaeology, which is of a high standard, indicates that further survey would be required to establish securely the extent and character of the wreck and the natural processes affecting its preservation in a marine environment. It also indicates that damage from trawling and dredging is not a significant risk to the stability of the site. There is potentially a risk from unlicensed salvage operations and, although this is considered to be a low risk given the depth of the wreck, this is a situation that would require active management.

In terms of the three options put forward in the consultation, the choice of management *in situ* is clearly the preferred one in terms of international and UK best practice. All the indications from the initial evaluation suggest that this approach is an obvious choice given lack of conclusive evidence that there is a serious risk to the preservation of the remains if they are left where they are. Considerable risks and uncertainties would attach to the surface recovery option and intrusive investigation of any kind at this stage cannot be justified.

Having said this, the option of management *in situ* does require an active programme of monitoring to understand the processes of change on the sea bed that might affect preservation. Measures to mitigate the potential risks from fishing damage and unauthorised salvage have been considered in detail by the Joint Nautical Archaeology Policy Committee and the Forum commends these suggestions for further consideration.

Question 2: Would you seek to offer any support, whether physical or financial, towards the future management of the site and its artefacts?

The Forum does not have financial resources on which it could draw for this purpose and it would be for individual member organisations to consider this question.

Question 3: Would you seek to offer any support, whether through expertise, interpretation or funding, towards further the greater public understanding of naval heritage which may be gained from the site?

A practical and conservative approach to managing the wreck site need not rule out the possibility of building on the lively public interest that there has been in the discovery of the HMS Victory. The issues that it raises, and the considerable knowledge that has

already been gained about the wreck, could provide a ready-made platform for improving public understanding about marine heritage protection and conservation. The Forum would be pleased to support, or provide a forum for developing, detailed discussion of proposals for this purpose together with other partners in the heritage sector.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gill Chitty". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end of the name.

Dr Gill Chitty, Council for British Archaeology
Secretary, The Archaeology Forum

The Archaeology Forum's members are:

The Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers UK
The Council for British Archaeology
The Institute of Conservation
The Institute for Archaeologists
The Nautical Archaeology Society
The National Trust

The National Trust for Scotland
Rescue: the British Archaeological Trust
The Society of Antiquaries of London
The Society of Antiquaries of Scotland
The Federation of Archaeological Managers and Employers
The Society of Museum Archaeologists UK