



The Hon. Edward Vaizey MP  
Minister of State  
Department for Culture, Media & Sport  
100 Parliament Street  
London, SW1A 2BQ

31 July 2014

Dear Mr. Vaizey,

Re: HMS *Victory* 1744 Re-visited

On 21 January and 11 March 2014, you chaired two meetings regarding the wreck of HMS *Victory* (1744), which was attended by all stakeholders. After preparing a third Project Design that was accepted by the Advisory Group, final information was requested from Lord Lingfield as Chairman of the Maritime Heritage Foundation. This information clarifying the recovery of at risk *Victory* artefacts was sent to the Advisory Group on 15 May. Since then the process has ground to a halt without any explanation or timeframe. The purpose of this letter is to ask you to intervene.

My understanding is that the only residual opposition is coming from English Heritage. May I ask that DCMS investigate as a matter of urgency this lack of collaboration, which is blocking a sincere attempt to save vital UK underwater cultural heritage? You gave English Heritage every opportunity to present their concerns at the above meetings, also in the presence of Dr. Thurley, and none were aired. It is unclear on whose authority they have subsequently felt empowered to stop the project and ignore your instructions.

The Maritime Heritage Foundation has demonstrated that the *Victory* Shipwreck Project adheres to the principles of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage and is aligned with HM Government strategy on heritage as defined in the *UK Marine Policy Statement*. In 25 years of fieldwork I have never seen any wreck worldwide subjected to so many checks and balances. Most UNESCO-ratified countries are in reality not writing Project Designs (we have produced three) and would never get off the ground if they agreed, as Odyssey Marine Exploration has, to provide a 'XXXXXXXX' contingency bond. The Maritime Heritage Foundation and Odyssey wish to reassure all stakeholders about their plans for education, science and public outreach. However, I am concerned that the endless demands have not been made in good faith, but are a deliberate attempt to delay and ultimately destroy the project.

At the last meeting the Maritime Heritage Foundation sought reassurances that the *Victory* Shipwreck Project was being afforded equal consideration to all other UK shipwreck projects. Regrettably this is not the case. The Swash Channel shipwreck is an outstanding project authorised by English Heritage despite its Project Design not once referencing the UNESCO Convention, no specification of where and how conservation would be conducted (artefacts were partly 'conserved' in the lead archaeologist's house and garden, not in a laboratory), with no funding details, and no accommodation for contingency or a related bond (despite the raising of extensive timbers).

Dr Sean Kingsley, Director, Wreck Watch Int •XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX:  
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More recently, English Heritage has begun excavation of the wreck of HMS *London* in the Thames Estuary under the scientifically incorrect theory that global warming is destroying the wreck. (By this extension every exposed wooden hull in UK waters would be at risk from the same global warming.) I understand that the site's destabilisation was in fact caused by a seabed dredger cutting into the wreckage and partly destroying it.

I fully support all initiatives that save at risk heritage, share wondrous finds with the public and promote UK culture, including Swash Channel and *London*. I make these observations to highlight how differently English Heritage has been advising in respect to HMS *Victory* 1744. I am acutely concerned that their approach to the wreck is political rather than scientific and educational, even though Dr. Thurley advised at the 21 January meeting that English Heritage has "no statutory locus" over the wreck. This has not prevented English Heritage continuously posting discussions about *Victory* from its Historic Wrecks Panel meetings, which otherwise make no references to the 46 formally UK protected shipwrecks that the Panel is remitted to discuss (and circulating publicly the address of an anti-*Victory* website).

I am further advised that other parties and UK licencees share these concerns. At a recent meeting of the Association of Protected Wreck Licencees, the members informed English Heritage that they would consider returning all licencees to English Heritage to manage themselves if it did not reconsider the political exploitation whereby licencees are being forced to buy Marine Management Organisation licencees to work sites already licenceed by English Heritage. If implemented, this step could cost DCMS up to £3.4 million a year. The Association also concluded that since the impact of all intrusive activities/excavations on shipwrecks is effectively zero compared to that wrought by nature, activities on wrecks should be reportable, not licensable.

English Heritage does some excellent work with limited resources, but has no experience on deep-sea sites outside territorial waters. I am concerned that the HMS *Victory* Shipwreck case is being subjected to a misuse of power to suit the political and personal ambitions of an acidic heritage lobby that does not adhere to government policy and is ignoring mutually agreed plans and timetables, including those laid out by you. I would like to request your advice on how to proceed. Clearly matters cannot continue in this 'Big Brother' manner.

I must reiterate that the pioneering nature of the highly costly *Victory* project would be unparalleled in UK history. It will save unique heritage at risk, promote British naval history worldwide, and leave a strong legacy for science and education. It would simply be cultural vandalism to neglect the site. While decisions have been pending, not only was *Victory* looted in 2010, but since then the two closest wrecks have been ransacked (a late 19<sup>th</sup>-century cargo of lead ingots and a mid-18<sup>th</sup> century French privateer). Hoping that deep-sea heritage can be left alone *in situ* because it is out of sight is poor advice.

Yours sincerely,

**Dr Sean Kingsley**  
Director, Wreck Watch Int

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cc. Michael Fallon, Secretary of State for Defence;  
Lord Astor, Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence.

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