

School group working on the Forgotten Wrecks project

The new project is due to commence this spring and seeks to raise the profile of a currently under-represented aspect of the First World War. While attention is often focused on the Western Front and major naval battles, historic remains from the First World War lie forgotten in and around our seas, rivers and estuaries.

With over 1,000 wartime wrecks in the UK's waters, the conflict has left a rich heritage legacy in terms of maritime archaeological remains and the many stories of bravery and sacrifice. These underwater memorials represent the vestiges of a vital maritime struggle of the First World War that was taking place on a daily basis, just off our shores.

The project's timing is aligned with the Centenary of the First World War and over four years will focus on some of the 700 South Coast wreck sites which include merchant and naval ships, passenger, troop and hospital ships, ports, wharfs and crashed aircraft. Some sites are official war graves but many are unrecognised and unprotected.

The Maritime Archaeology Trust will engage communities and volunteers to improve the research and knowledge of these archaeologically significant sites to feed into local, regional and national historic records. The information collected by the project will be made widely available through the internet and will be turned into an extensive range of educational resources and exhibits to engage the public. These will include videos, talks and presentations, publications, geocaches and 3D technology to bring underwater history to the surface. Temporary exhibitions will take place at venues across all six of England's southern counties.

Volunteers and young people will take an active role in the project and develop new skills in research and technology whilst learning how our national maritime heritage fits into the global historic picture.

Furthermore, with the 100th anniversary of the start of the First World War approaching, the project will not only commemorate our maritime wartime heritage but will also provide a lasting legacy of information and learning resources on First World War wrecks for future generations.

Garry Momber, Director of the Maritime Archaeology Trust said: “I am delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund is supporting this project. These wrecks are subject to corrosion and the impact of our changing seas so it is only a matter of time before many of these sites could become scattered elements on the seabed. There is a real risk that knowledge of these wrecks, if not fully researched, could be lost forever. This project is not only timely, but essential to help raise the profile of maritime conflicts in the history books of tomorrow.”

Stuart McLeod, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South East, said: “Forgotten Wrecks will open up a part of our wartime heritage that has remained largely under-researched and undervalued. The immense contribution to the war effort made at sea and the thousands of people who lost their lives just off our shores deserve to be remembered. This project will gather valuable information on the hundreds of wrecks that lie beneath the waves and piece together their journeys and the stories of those that sailed and fought on them. We at the Heritage Lottery Fund have already invested £47m into projects commemorating the Centenary and will continue to help communities across the UK explore and understand how the conflict has shaped our modern world.”

Notes to editors

The Maritime Archaeology Trust is a registered charity with over 22 years’ experience in research, investigations and pioneering techniques for the study of marine cultural heritage. Originating in the South of England as the Hampshire and Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology, the organisation has grown from regional roots to an internationally renowned authority on maritime archaeological issues and research.

The trust was established in 1991 and today runs a programme of research and fieldwork, which investigates underwater sites such as shipwrecks and submerged prehistoric landscapes, as well as hulks and maritime structures present on the intertidal and foreshore area. Results of this fieldwork and research feed into the trust’s award winning Education and Outreach dissemination programme and its Sunken Secrets exhibition on the Isle of Wight.

Further information

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