



Response to DCMS Museums Review

Honor Frost Foundation Steering Committee
on Underwater Cultural Heritage

October 2016

This document is submitted to the DCMS Museums Review on behalf of the Steering Committee on Underwater Cultural Heritage of the Honor Frost Foundation.

The Steering Committee welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the DCMS Museums Review. Museums play a fundamental role in enabling the public to engage with our cultural heritage, and in ensuring that significant collections remain safeguarded and accessible for future generations.

This fundamental role is as true for underwater cultural heritage – and maritime collections more generally – as it is for collections with a land-based provenance. Indeed, the importance of museums is all the greater when they enable the public to engage with cultural heritage that is hidden to most through being submerged. Providing physical access to artefacts from under the sea, and intellectual access to their context and meaning, underline not only the public value of museums with marine collections; but also account for the great interest they receive.

Accordingly, the Steering Committee would like to underline the need for the DCMS review to pay thorough attention to museums with marine and maritime collections as a distinct category, both amongst national government-sponsored museums and accredited local and regional museums. For example, we would encourage the proposed ‘state of the nation’ report to pay express attention to museums with marine and maritime collections. It would be especially valuable for the mapping exercise to identify marine and maritime collections and to use this categorisation in collating data on visitor numbers and geographical distribution. As noted above, the value of digitising collections and increasing (online) accessibility are especially important in conveying the significance of a maritime past that is often unseen.

We would like to draw the attention of the review to a recent report published by the Honor Frost Foundation entitled *The Social and Economic Benefits of Marine and Maritime Cultural Heritage*. The report is available for download¹. The conclusion of the report included the following points that are directly pertinent to this review:

- Marine and maritime cultural heritage should receive much greater attention as a facet of culture and heritage generally, and as a facet of the marine environment. Its presence is pervasive even far from the sea and its importance to people economically and socially warrants specific consideration. Its absence from debates and from policy should be remedied. Marine and maritime cultural heritage is not a minority concern; participation and economic activity can already be measured in millions.
- It is essential that the breadth and diversity of marine and maritime cultural heritage is recognised, and that this becomes a driver for a joined-up approach to identifying and increasing social and economic benefits. The ‘offer’ of marine and maritime cultural heritage will be much greater if traditional boundaries between disciplines and environments are overcome.

¹ http://honorfrostfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/HFF_Report_2015_web-4.pdf

- Further research, including quantification, should be carried out on the social and economic benefits of marine and maritime heritage, equivalent to the research and quantification that is being carried out for culture and heritage on land and for the marine environment. Marine and maritime heritage should be identifiable in periodic surveys of, for example, visitor numbers, participation, and spending.

The Steering Committee would also like to underline the great importance of museums in England in exhibiting underwater cultural heritage from the Eastern Mediterranean, which is the particular focus of the Honor Frost Foundation. The underwater cultural heritage of the Mediterranean is hugely significant for the understanding of all our pasts, including in the UK, but there is no doubt that this heritage suffers particularly from the great political and economic pressures in the Eastern Mediterranean. It is very important that the UK takes a lead in supporting the cultural heritage of the Mediterranean at the current time. To this end, the Honor Frost Foundation was very pleased to support underwater archaeology in the Mediterranean through the special exhibition *Storms, War and Shipwrecks Treasures from the Sicilian Seas* at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford this summer. We hope that the DCMS will acknowledge the important role of English museums in exhibiting underwater cultural heritage from around the world.

Unfortunately, not all underwater cultural heritage is recovered with the intention of safeguarding it for advancing science and furthering public access. A major step forward has been achieved, however, by the introduction of an international standard for the conduct of archaeological activities directed at underwater cultural heritage through the 2001 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage. The 2001 UNESCO Convention provides a crucial benchmark that provides assurance to museums of the professional and ethical standards that are to be expected with respect to collections of underwater cultural heritage. The 2001 UNESCO Convention is already in force and has been ratified by an increasing number of states. It is essential that the UK also ratifies the 2001 UNESCO Convention, reflecting not only the UK's global lead on matters relating to cultural heritage, but also to extend the effective protection of underwater cultural heritage in international waters. With the British Academy, the Honor Frost Foundation has supported the case for UK ratification of the 2001 UNESCO Convention in a policy brief, which can also be downloaded².

A final point that the Steering Committee would like to underline is the need to develop a proper strategy for the museum care of underwater cultural heritage and related archives recovered in English waters. The DCMS Museums Review will undoubtedly be appraised of the general 'archives crisis' affecting material generated by archaeological investigations on land, especially as a consequence of planning requirements. It may be less well appreciated that the same crisis also applies to material generated from archaeological activities at sea, arising in part because of requirements placed on developers by the statutory UK Marine Policy Statement. Underwater cultural heritage from English waters is also coming to light as a result of the very successful quasi-voluntary reporting protocols that apply to the marine aggregates and offshore renewables industries, and which are being extended to the fishing industry and to the public more generally. The increase in material and information that is arising from marine development and other sources is radically changing our understanding of the history of England, and fascinates the public. However, it presents particular challenges. First, the predominantly county-based system of collection areas does not encompass archives that originate outside those areas, in the marine area. Second, it is of particular importance that the material archive of artefacts is curated alongside digital data such as photographs, video and geophysical traces which provide the context within which artefacts can be understood. Accordingly, we would ask that the DCMS Museums Review pays particular attention to the need to develop collection areas for accredited museums that encompass marine areas; and to ensure that the digital capabilities of museums are fully supported so that they can curate all elements of an archive comprehensively.

We would be very pleased to provide further information to the review on these points if it would be helpful.

² <http://honorfrostfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/BA-HFF-Case-for-UK-ratification.pdf>

About the Honor Frost Foundation

The Honor Frost Foundation's mission is to promote the advancement and research, including publication, of marine and maritime archaeology with particular but not exclusive focus on the Eastern Mediterranean with an emphasis on Lebanon, Syria and Cyprus.

The Foundation also seeks to foster and promote the protection of underwater cultural heritage (UCH).

The Foundation was founded in 2011 with a legacy from the pioneering underwater archaeologist Honor Frost.