



HISTORIC VESSELS AT RISK: GUIDANCE

November 2023





NATIONAL HISTORIC SHIPS UK

The official voice for historic vessels in the United Kingdom

Historic Vessels at Risk

Historic vessels can be put at risk by a whole range of factors. Sometimes it's as simple as deteriorating fabric leading to a need for conservation work which their custodians either can't afford to fund or do not have the necessary skills and infrastructure to undertake. This can lead to abandonment, dismantling or deconstruction. In other cases, vessels suffer from poor management, lack of protection, heritage crime, failing business models, limited understanding of their significance or insufficient engagement with the local community. They are subject to changing circumstances, both in those who care for them and across the wider economy which can impact on people's ability to maintain them effectively. Being made of perishable materials, they are also put at risk due to external factors, including the increasing impact of climate change.

There is no statutory protection for historic vessels meaning that when a vessel becomes at risk, it may end up being lost even if there is the will to save it. At risk situations often arise unexpectedly, with custodians having to respond very quickly. However, depending on the position and timescale there can still be opportunities to turn the situation around and safeguard the vessel's future or, at the least, make sure it is fully recorded before it is too late. National Historic Ships UK offers help and guidance to custodians of registered historic vessels at risk, monitors craft facing challenging circumstances and can give advice in various ways. This paper is aimed at those with the responsibility for, or ownership of, a historic vessel. It sets out the level of support we provide and the different avenues to explore when a vessel in your care has an uncertain future or you become aware of a craft in difficulty.

About National Historic Ships (NHS-UK)

NHS-UK is a government funded, independent organisation which gives objective advice to UK governments and local authorities, funding bodies, the historic ships sector and other stakeholders on all matters relating to historic vessels in the UK. It maintains a set of five databases including the National Register of Historic Vessels, which lists over 1,500 historic craft, and the National Historic Fleet, some 200 vessels considered of pre-eminent regional or national importance. It also manages the Shipshape Network, which was set up to promote the regeneration of traditional maritime skills and connects just under 100 external maritime heritage projects around the UK.

Assessing the level of risk

NHS-UK does not hold a published list of historic vessels considered 'at risk' across the National Registers. However, it has developed the matrix below which uses a traffic light system to assess risk. This has been applied to vessels on the National Historic Fleet as an internal management tool. It identifies vessels at high risk where intervention is needed, those which require monitoring and those currently in a secure position.

Description	1	2	3	Comments
Contact with Owner	0-12 mths	12-36mths	>36 mths	Lack of contact with owner or non-completion of annual return suggests disengagement and restricts NHS-UK's ability to make a full assessment
Vessel status: Operational	In regular use	Pending or undergoing conservation	Abandoned / permanently laid up or sunk / subject to deconstruction	Status if vessel is operational and afloat
Vessel status: Static	In preservation with high level monitoring or environmental controls in place. Well supported structurally.	Under cover / permanently located with limited controls in place / structural support issues identified	Open to elements ashore or afloat with no monitoring in place / abandoned / subject to disposal or deconstruction / major structural issues	Status if vessel is in static preservation, afloat or ashore
Significance Recognized	Significance clearly understood by stakeholders & SOS written	Significance understood by limited stakeholders	Not recognized or appreciated by owners or key stakeholders	Is significance documented and appreciated by stakeholders? Has an SOS been written?
Current Condition	Good	Average / Fair	Poor / Deteriorating	Overall current condition of vessel, hull and fixtures / fittings
Maintenance	Long-term plan in place and being implemented	Ad-hoc / maintenance undertaken as required	None	Standard and level of maintenance planned and executed. Regular docking schedule and surveys where necessary
Governance	Strong governance / management / ownership structure in place	Governance / ownership model requires review or is in difficulty	None in place / disputed, act of court / in flux (i.e. for sale or seeking new owner)	Governance / ownership of the vessel is an indicator of future care, ability to raise funds or effectively manage maintenance and conservation.
Funding	Clear business model with track record of fundraising / endowment / private funds / major grant in place	Privately financed with limited resources / history of previously unsuccessful funding bids / no reserves	No business model, private means or track record / in need of significant investment	Vessels in need of significant funding with no endowment, reserves or private means, or with a poor track record of fundraising are considered at risk.
Community Impact / Partnerships	Local community support for vessel / strong public engagement / partnership or outreach programmes in place	Some community benefit / public engagement in place but more needed	Limited or no community impact and public engagement / reticence to enter into partnerships	Does the vessel have community support outside its ownership circle? Is there a high level of public engagement and are the custodians willing to work in partnership to achieve more?
External factors	No external factors posing an immediate threat	Some external factors flagged as potential concern	External factors posing an immediate or long-term threat	External factors for consideration include: mooring or vessel location not secured, threats from residential development, access, security, regulatory issues, stance of local government, skills / staff shortages, climate change or environmental factors etc.
Long-term viability	Appears secure: not at risk	Some challenges highlighted: monitoring needed	Marginal / not deemed viable: action needed	Final analysis: based on risk matrix are you confident the situation will be significantly improved in five years time? Do you think this vessel will survive in the short, medium or longer term?

If you are concerned that a vessel on the Fleet or National Register of Historic Vessels falls largely within the orange or red traffic light zones below, please inform us so we can carry out further assessment or update our records. If you are the custodian of a vessel within the National Historic Fleet and would like to discuss where your vessel sits within this matrix, or how to move across to the green zones, we will be happy to set up a meeting. For more information on the At Risk Survey carried out in 2023, see: [The Registers | National Historic Ships](#).

Considering measures of protection

As there is no statutory protection available for historic vessels in the UK, when a decision is taken to scrap or dismantle a vessel it is not always possible to prevent this outcome. It is advisable to register historic vessels that are permanently fixed to the ground or another permanent structure in the relevant Historic Environment Records¹ so that their existence is visible and understood. Their heritage significance may then be taken into consideration in planning decisions that directly affect them or their setting.

For vessels to whom the above does not apply, their status as a registered historic vessel can still be a way of highlighting significance in circumstances where the vessel has come under threat. NHS-UK can verify the heritage merit of craft on the National Historic Ship Registers and custodians are advised to develop a draft statement of significance using the online template² which can then be finalised in conjunction with us. If a vessel location or mooring is in jeopardy, thus placing the vessel itself at risk, NHS-UK may be able to help with a letter of support or by interceding with the relevant authority. However, this brings no guarantee of success and NHS-UK can not become involved in any legal disputes.

Finding your historic vessel a new home

If you or your organisation are no longer able to care for a historic vessel, you may wish to explore alternative ownership. NHS-UK is not a brokerage firm but we can recommend ways to advertise your vessel for sale. You can search our Directory of Skills & Services³ under 'brokerage' for details of sector specialists who can advertise and manage the sale for you. Alternatively, you can advertise via a magazine or class association. If you inform us that your vessel is for sale, we can indicate this on her Register entry, add the details to our regularly updated online 'for sale' list and market the opportunity via our monthly e-newsletter and social media platforms. When we are aware that a registered vessel is for sale, we also consider whether any organisations, museums or projects have an interest in that specific type of craft and can put you in contact with them as appropriate. If that vessel is particularly significant to a local area elsewhere in the UK, we can reach out to any contacts in that region via our network of Shipshape projects and hubs. Vessels can be advertised with a sale price attached, free to a good home or for a nominal sum of £1. The latter options are particularly appropriate for conservation, rescue or potential deconstruction projects.

Contact one of the specialist brokerage firms listed on our Skills Directory, such as:

www.mjlewisboatsales.com

www.classicyachtbrokerage.co.uk

www.sandemanyachtcompany.co.uk

<https://woodenships.co.uk>

¹ [Historic Environment Records \(HERs\) | Historic England](#)

² [Statements of Significance | National Historic Ships](#)

³ [Skills & Services | National Historic Ships](#)

Setting up or reviewing your governance structure

To provide a secure future for a historic vessel, it's important to have the right governance structure in place. This may require you to set up a trust, secure charitable status, review your governance model or seek new trustees. NHS-UK can provide case studies based on the governance structure adopted by other historic vessels. You can advertise for new trustees via the job vacancies ⁴ web form on the Shipshape Network section of our website, indicating that it is an unpaid opportunity. We will then promulgate this widely via our newsletter and social media. Further guidance around governance, attracting younger trustees and building a resilient organisation can be found via our free webinar⁵ 'Would your maritime heritage organisation stand up to scrutiny?', hosted in partnership with the Maritime Heritage Trust.

Lack of funds for conservation work or maintenance

If your vessel is at risk due to its deteriorating condition and a lack of funds to undertake conservation or maintenance work, the first step is to read our Funding Guidelines ⁶. These set out the ways that we can help you, the advice process we provide, our guidance materials, as well as summarising the funding sources that exist and sharing case studies of successful projects.

Consider applying to the National Heritage Memorial Fund ⁷ if your vessel is on the National Historic Fleet and at risk of imminent irreparable damage without emergency repairs. To explore this route, you will need to have considered all other sources of funding first, be a not-for-profit organisation and be applying on behalf of a publicly accessible heritage asset.

If your vessel is ineligible for this type of funding, crowdfunding might still offer an alternative route, particularly for smaller sums to stabilise or move it, buying time for a more detailed bid to be developed. There are many case studies of successful crowd-funded projects involving historic vessels that we can share with you. We can also promote your crowd-funding details on our social media platforms and monthly newsletter. For top tips on setting up a crowd-funding campaign, view the presentation ⁸ by Rose Ravetz of the Wind, Tide & Oar project which was part of the 2023 webinar on 'New approaches to funding maritime heritage'.

Dealing with external factors that threaten the survival of your vessel

The future of your vessel may be affected by external factors such as mooring or location issues, threats from surrounding residential development, access or security problems, regulatory matters, skills or staff shortages, climate change or environmental hazards etc. NHS-UK can offer assistance in a variety of ways.

If your mooring falls under the jurisdiction of a port / harbour authority or a marina company, we can send a letter of support underlining the significance of the vessel, its role and relevance to the local area. Alternatively, through our network of hubs around the UK, as well as the growing Heritage Harbour ⁹ community, we may be able to assist in finding an alternative berthing location.

⁴ [Create Job | National Historic Ships](#)

⁵ <https://youtu.be/lgjRpi6Jdnw?si=8OyBVixOoJnfPUqN>

⁶ [NHS-UK Funding Guidelines | National Historic Ships](#)

⁷ [Funding | National Heritage Memorial Fund \(nhmf.org.uk\)](#)

⁸ [\(36\) Webinar - New Approaches to Funding Maritime Heritage - YouTube](#)

⁹ [Location Map \(maritimeheritage.org.uk\)](#)

If your vessel has been subject to vandalism, theft or criminal activity in some form, we will direct you to the Heritage Crime guidelines ¹⁰produced by Historic England. It is vital that you report this crime in a specific way to ensure appropriate sentencing.

The Directory of Skills & Services ¹¹ lists over 800 individuals and organisations currently supplying materials, providing services or undertaking work in relation to historic vessels. However, we know that there are specialist areas where skills are dying out, as well as mobilisation issues in certain parts of the UK. The rising cost of materials and labour can make a project collapse which was previously considered viable. Before making the decision to cease work and dispose of the vessel, please contact us for advice.

Our climate change guidelines ¹² offer practical steps and recommendations of how to mitigate and adapt to growing environmental threats. We can also connect you to other heritage vessel custodians who have experienced climate change related issues and are willing to share learning about measures taken in response.

The end of the road?

If you are considering scrapping or dismantling your historic vessel, please talk to us first! We have guidelines in place on *Recording and Deconstructing Historic Vessels* ¹³ which are available to download from our website for free. These will guide you through the process we have put in place for these situations, ensuring that every avenue has been explored first and that the vessel is fully recorded and documented if no alternative solution can be found.

Vessels for whom there is no sustainable future will be recorded in perpetuity on the National Archive of Historic Vessels ¹⁴(NAHV) which is managed by NHS-UK and it is important that as accurate a description as possible is provided for this.

If you are a harbour or port authority, or a vessel has been abandoned on a site within your jurisdiction, please contact us for advice. We will be able to provide details on the significance of the vessel and whether any recording is considered necessary, as well as share our guidelines on deconstruction. We are also participating in research undertaken by DEFRA ¹⁵to inform the national approach to abandoned vessels as part of the marine litter plan.

¹⁰ [Heritage Crime | Historic England](#)

¹¹ [Skills & Services | National Historic Ships](#)

¹² [Climate Change & Maritime Heritage | National Historic Ships](#)

¹³ [Publications | National Historic Ships](#)

¹⁴ [About the Registers | National Historic Ships](#)

¹⁵ [B.2.1 Manage end-of-life recreational vessels | OSPAR Commission](#)

Helpful links:

Historic England - [Heritage at Risk | Historic England](#)

Historic Environment Records - [Historic Environment Records \(HERs\) | Historic England](#)

Canmore: National Record of the Historic Environment - <https://canmore.org.uk/>

Museums Association Disposal Toolkit - [Disposal toolkit - Museums Association](#)

Arts Council statement on heritage, museums and collections at risk - [Statement on heritage museums and collections at risk.pdf \(artscouncil.org.uk\)](#)

Association of Independent Museums - [Resources - AIM - Association of Independent Museums \(aim-museums.co.uk\)](#)

Heritage Funding Directory - [Heritage Funding Directory \(heritagefundingdirectoryuk.org\)](#)

For advice or further information, contact:

National Historic Ships UK

Park Row

Greenwich

SE10 9NF

Tel: 0208 312 8558

info@nationalhistoricships.org.uk

www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk