

International Conference on Historic Ships 2009

**London, United Kingdom
19-20 November 2009**



The Royal Institution of
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SECURING THE FUTURE OF HISTORIC VESSELS IN THE UK

H Cunliffe, National Historic Ships, UK

SUMMARY

UK historic vessels have no official protection and National Historic Ships is working for greater recognition, so that if DCMS' bid to include the Heritage Protection Bill in the next session succeeds, we can seek official status for the Register of Historic Vessels. We are also promoting spot-listing for the National Historic Fleet, offering a breathing space to consider alternative futures for high risk vessels. Additionally, we are concerned about lack of funding and are calling for an Endowment Fund to sustain major projects. This paper provides an overview of these concerns, analysing the future of UK historic vessels. It will incorporate issues from the key topics of: recording and deconstruction, preservation afloat or dry, and maintenance of craft skills and training.

1. INTRODUCTION

National Historic Ships was established in 2006 as a non-departmental public body, funded by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), with a specific remit to advise the Secretary of State and other key bodies on ship preservation and funding within the UK. It is the successor to the National Historic Ships Committee which was inaugurated in 1991 to consider problems facing historic vessels and their long term future. Today, National Historic Ships is run by an Advisory Committee of eleven members, plus a chair, which serves in an honorary capacity and meets regularly throughout the year. A small supporting office team, headed by Martyn Heighton, today's key note speaker, is based at offices in the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.

National Historic Ships maintains the National Register of Historic Vessels (NRHV), which is a database of over 1,000 vessels meeting the criteria of: over 33 feet long, 50 years old, based in the UK, substantially intact and with demonstrable significance to UK history. Part of our remit is to raise the profile of these vessels in the UK and seek official protection for their futures. In order for these vessels to survive in perpetuity, they require support in a variety of forms:- greater funding, developed associated skills and services, protection through official legislation and a more informed understanding of their value on a national basis. This paper explores these issues in further depth, whilst at the same time outlining the action National Historic Ships is currently taking to address these subjects and ensure a long-term future for maritime heritage in the UK.

2. LACK OF PROTECTION FOR VESSELS ON THE NATIONAL HISTORIC FLEET

Heritage Protection has been a major public issue in recent years, with the draft Heritage Protection Bill drawn up in 2008. Many heritage organisations have suffered from the fact that this Bill did not become law but, in the maritime sector, the problem goes deeper than this. Even if the Heritage Protection Bill had been successful at that time, it would still not have brought

security for vessels on the NRHV since, despite the efforts of National Historic Ships, the Register was not recognised in the draft Bill. The government response to letters from National Historic Ships highlighted the difficulties of protecting historic vessels in any official sense, due to problems caused by their movability. Since the failure of the Heritage Protection Bill, National Historic Ships has been working with this issue, to demonstrate the need for protection, but also to show how this can readily be achieved within the current system. Within the NRHV, there is a sub-group of vessels which are of pre-eminent national significance and therefore demand the highest priority in terms of their preservation. Vessels in this category make up the National Historic Fleet and can also be drawn from the National Small Boat Register (NSBR), a separate database currently managed by the National Maritime Museum Cornwall. These vessels are the most significant examples of their type, but currently there is no legislation in place to protect them or the rest of the Register from total loss. As a result, National Historic Ships is powerless to prevent these key vessels from being destroyed, in many cases, as a direct result of lack of funding, management issues or poor supporting infrastructure.

MV *Wincham*, a Merseyside estuarial coaster and valued member of the National Historic Fleet was scrapped in May 2009 following controversy amongst her governing organisation and a survey reporting repairs of between £15,000 and £40,000. This vessel was broken up so quickly and with such little warning that National Historic Ships had no time to assist with considerations for an alternative future, despite the fact that new owners were coming forward and only a relatively small monetary sum was outstanding. This unnecessary loss, caused simply by changes in management and withdrawn funding, focused the Advisory Committee on the importance of seeking protection for historic vessels in similar predicaments. As many of the vessels in the National Historic Fleet are operational, it was felt that a listing scheme would be restrictive and inappropriate to their needs. Therefore, National Historic Ships is proposing a spot-listing policy, which would enable a 'stop order' to be put on vessels in high-risk situations.

This would give a breathing space for all parties, during which National Historic Ships would work to secure a future for the vessel or, in the event of this proving impossible, to record her thoroughly before she is destroyed. Spot-listing would only be invoked for a set period, at the end of which, if no sustainable future had been found, National Historic Ships would agree deconstruction of the vessel to its published guidelines. In this way, spot-listing ensures that no vessel is scrapped when it could be avoided and that every option is fully explored.

In addition, there is a need to widen appreciation of maritime heritage so it is viewed as an integral part of the historic environment. National Historic Ships recently commented on the government's draft *Vision for the Historic Environment* which made no reference to historic vessels or the NRHV. However, whilst our feedback was welcomed, at the time of writing this paper DCMS stated that it was unable to make the amendments we requested because historic vessels were not included in the draft Heritage Protection Bill and therefore did not fall within the parameters under consideration. In conjunction with English Heritage, the government has also published *Policy Planning Statement 15: Planning for the Historic Environment*, which was out for consultation until the end of October 2009. Disappointingly, this document again does not cover historic vessels or list them as heritage assets. National Historic Ships has responded with a request for the definitions within the document to be reassessed, particularly since decisions made by regional planning authorities in the UK have often been known to have a considerable negative impact on historic vessels moored locally. It is clear that a broader recognition is needed amongst authoritative bodies, to illustrate the ways historic vessels can slot into the existing legislation and co-exist alongside it.

3. UNDERSTANDING HISTORIC VESSELS

Closely linked to the idea of heritage protection are issues of recording, preservation and deconstruction. In 2007, National Historic Ships published on its website, the first two documents of a three-part series, *Understanding Historic Vessels*. The two volumes now available online give information on how to Record and Deconstruct a historic vessel. These are guidance publications, offering practical advice on how to capture the quintessential characteristics of a vessel and ensure that the subsequent records are kept safely and accessibly. The volume on Deconstruction advises on best practise in a situation where every effort has been made to save a historic vessel, but no practicable solution can be found. *Deconstructing Historic Vessels* takes the reader through the dismantling process, explaining how this can be done in a controlled manner to ensure that a full record is preserved and all avenues are explored to save materials and vessel parts. National Historic Ships

has also launched the National Archive of Historic Vessels (NAHV) on its website, to ensure that details are kept of all those vessels previously on the NRHV which have now been lost.

The third volume in this series is with the design team and will be out for consultation in early 2010. Its working title is the *Conservation Pilot Book* and it will act as a handbook on the principles of ship preservation, guiding vessel owners as to what route is most appropriate for them and asking key questions on the purpose or proposed future use of the vessel. It will clearly define the differences between conservation for static display or conservation for operational use and will be published in summer 2010 in hard copy form. In addition, National Historic Ships will be producing a web based bibliography alongside this book, allowing web users to download a variety of associated reference sources which are no longer available in print, or have never been published as they may be in the form of theses or conference papers. These three works – *Recording Historic Vessels*, *Deconstructing Historic Vessels* and the *Conservation Pilot Book* – are important steps forward in terms of maritime heritage, providing authoritative guidelines for vessel owners from all backgrounds and with widely differing types of boat. In commissioning these works, National Historic Ships hopes to promote a better understanding of the value of historic vessels amongst their owners as well as providing a standard of good practise, which projects should strive to meet.

4. FUNDING FOR HISTORIC VESSELS

National Historic Ships is aware that the majority of historic vessel owners experience funding difficulties. We administer a small grants fund which was launched in 2006 to assist owners, trusts and societies responsible for craft on the NRHV. Grants awarded enable owners to attend conferences, training courses, develop business plans, improve interpretation, undertake essential repairs and purchase vital equipment. Since the total sum administered is relatively small, National Historic Ships elected to award a maximum of £2,000 or 50% of the costs (whichever is the lesser) to each successful applicant, thereby broadening the number of people the scheme could help. National Historic Ships is aiming to disperse at least £150,000 through this programme by 2011 and has already grant aided two of the places for attendance at the last RINA: Historic Ships conference.

However, National Historic Ships is well aware that the scope of the fund available to us is limited. We constantly seek further funding and, in 2008, were successful in obtaining a grant from the Headley Trust to be used for the purposes of increasing maritime heritage based training. We have also commissioned research by one of our consultants into potential funding sources and he has supplied a spreadsheet, under organisations that offer

awards which might be relevant to vessel owners, which can now be viewed on our website. We are regularly consulted by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the PRISM Fund for advice on the grant applications which they receive in relation to historic vessels. Part of our work involves commenting on this, assessing the significance of the vessel applying for grant aid and advising on the practicalities of their management plans and whether the best scheme has been proposed for the vessel's future. We recognise that private owners, who currently make up a large proportion of those with vessels on the NRHV, experience particular difficulty in locating funding since they can not apply to organisations of this kind. Therefore, National Historic Ships is also promoting the establishment of an Endowment Fund as one of its long-term aims.

5. SHIP PRESERVATION NETWORK PROMOTING SKILLS & TRAINING

In Autumn 2008, National Historic Ships published an online Directory of Skills & Services, which was the culmination of a six month Infrastructure Audit into the decline of traditional maritime craftsmanship in the UK. The outcomes of this survey demonstrated the need for revived facilities and increased training in skills that are dying out without the commercial demand for them. Historic vessel owners are having to seek materials or skills from abroad in order to maintain their vessels, or travel large distances to find the facilities needed for annual refits. As a further result of this audit, National Historic Ships will be launching a UK-wide ship preservation network in Spring 2010, which will act as a marketing framework for the sector, drawing together vessel owners, businesses, training providers, heritage bodies and all those with an interest in maintaining historic or high value vessels. The ship preservation network will be based on four pilot areas – Solent, Medway, Bristol and Mersey. These have been chosen because they offer either a natural concentration of existing resources, or disused facilities which can become the basis of a new ship preservation site.

Meetings have been held in the pilot areas with key groups to gain initial support for the proposal. In the Solent, a group gathered on board National Historic Ships' 2009 flagship ss *Shieldhall*, to discuss local issues and how the establishment of a network could be of assistance. The large number of existing practitioners makes the Solent a prime area and the benefits of working together with National Historic Ships as a facilitator could result in opportunities for mutual funding applications, training development and shared technical support. On the Bristol Channel, the network incorporates Spike Island and those maritime tradesmen operating in the vicinity and spreads outwards to encompass the dry docks in Sharpness and Gloucester. Plans for a Medway network are focussed on the disused facilities at Sheerness Dockyard, the historic vessel

projects at Faversham, and Chatham. The Mersey offers itself as a fourth pilot network, with plans for a heritage workshop to develop at the National Inland Waterways Museum, Ellesmere Port. This will be particularly interesting for the inland waterways craft on the NRHV, as well as bringing larger vessels into the network via Liverpool and the Docks.

A new website is being developed which will be dedicated to the Network and will mark the official launch of the scheme when it goes live in 2010. The website will act as a communication tool, to get all those involved sharing information and working together for common ends. It will provide a news forum and members of the Advisory Committee have volunteered to stand as local representatives, offering advice and guidance as well as visiting projects in each area. The current Directory of Skills & Services will be broken down into regional networks and will grow through this scheme to provide a critical resource for vessel owners. National Historic Ships intends that the ship preservation network will forge partnerships between local and national organisations, creating funding and training opportunities that otherwise would not have come together.

6. RAISING THE PROFILE OF HISTORIC VESSELS

National Historic Ships is working hard for the historic vessel sector to raise awareness of this area of maritime heritage and the public benefits it can bring, as well as demonstrate the need to accord it greater protection. We have recently formed two new working groups to look at our involvement in the Cultural Olympiad and ways of demonstrating our worth politically. 2012 provides an exciting opportunity for the cultural sector, not only during the Games, but also in the years leading up to them and as part of their legacy. National Historic Ships participated in a seminar to look at the Torch Relay route across Britain, which aims to come within an hour's journey of 95% of the population. From this, it is easy to see the potential for getting involved and National Historic Ships will shortly be submitting a proposal via Heritage Link's Discovering Places team, to outline how historic vessels can contribute to the Cultural Olympiad.

We are also aware of the importance, particularly with the general election on the horizon, of considering ways to raise awareness of historic vessels amongst key government officials and MPs. National Historic Ships has implemented a quantitative research survey, looking at the contributions made to the economy by historic vessels. This is available from our website and is aimed at all owners of historic vessels, not just those listed on the NRHV. This study will also encompass grant aid awarded to vessels by major grant giving bodies, such as HLF and PRISM, as well as requesting tourism figures from towns which have held water based festivals and employment data from maritime craftsmen and well

established boatbuilding yards. The results of this survey will be published in a report, demonstrating the value of maritime heritage on a national level.

National Historic Ships produces a regular e-Newsletter and will be launching a photograph competition in 2010, aimed at all those with an interest in maritime heritage. We encourage owners, heritage bodies and members of the public to visit our website regularly, since it is kept updated with any relevant news items or opportunities for promotion. We also advocate that other organisations with vessels on the NRHV work with us wherever possible and consult us over similar schemes they are running, so that we can ensure our resources are employed in the most effective way for all concerned.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The establishment of National Historic Ships by DCMS in 2006 was a considerable step in the right direction for the future of the UK's historic vessels. The three years since have demonstrated how much can be achieved in a short time, with relatively small resources. We have become an established authority from which grant giving bodies regularly seek advice and the publication of *Understanding Historic Vessels* has provided a benchmark for best practise which the *Conservation Pilot Book* will build upon in 2010. The NRHV continues to grow, with new registrations averaging 6-9 vessels per month. The survey covering historic vessel input to the national economy will demonstrate the significance of our sector and highlight the need for these unique vessels to receive official protection. With limited funds, our grant scheme continues to be oversubscribed, demonstrating the financial difficulties that many owners face in the day-to-day running costs of keeping their historic vessel going. The ship preservation network will lead the way for greater mutual co-operation and support between all interested parties. However, the tragic loss of *Wincham* earlier this year provides a sobering note, illustrating clearly the precarious status of all those listed on the NRHV. Without covering legislation, no vessel is safe and National Historic Ships will continue to prioritise heritage protection above all else to ensure that our maritime heritage is preserved for future generations. The simple lesson to be learnt yet again is that if historic ships are to survive and thrive, we cannot rely on good will and warm feelings alone.

8. REFERENCES

National Historic Ships, 'Understanding Historic Vessels', 2007

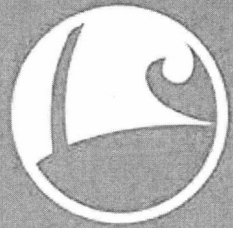
9. AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Hannah Cunliffe holds the current position of Policy and Project Manager for National Historic Ships. She is responsible for raising the profile of maritime heritage and seeking greater protection for those vessels in the National Historic Fleet. She is working on a number of major projects which include: publication of the *Conservation Pilot Book*, development of a UK-wide ship preservation network and historic vessel involvement in the Cultural Olympiad. Before accepting the role in April 2009, Hannah worked as a freelance maritime researcher and consultant for ten years and spent her childhood sailing onboard a Bristol Channel pilot cutter.

SECURING THE FUTURE OF HISTORIC VESSELS IN THE UK

Hannah Cunliffe

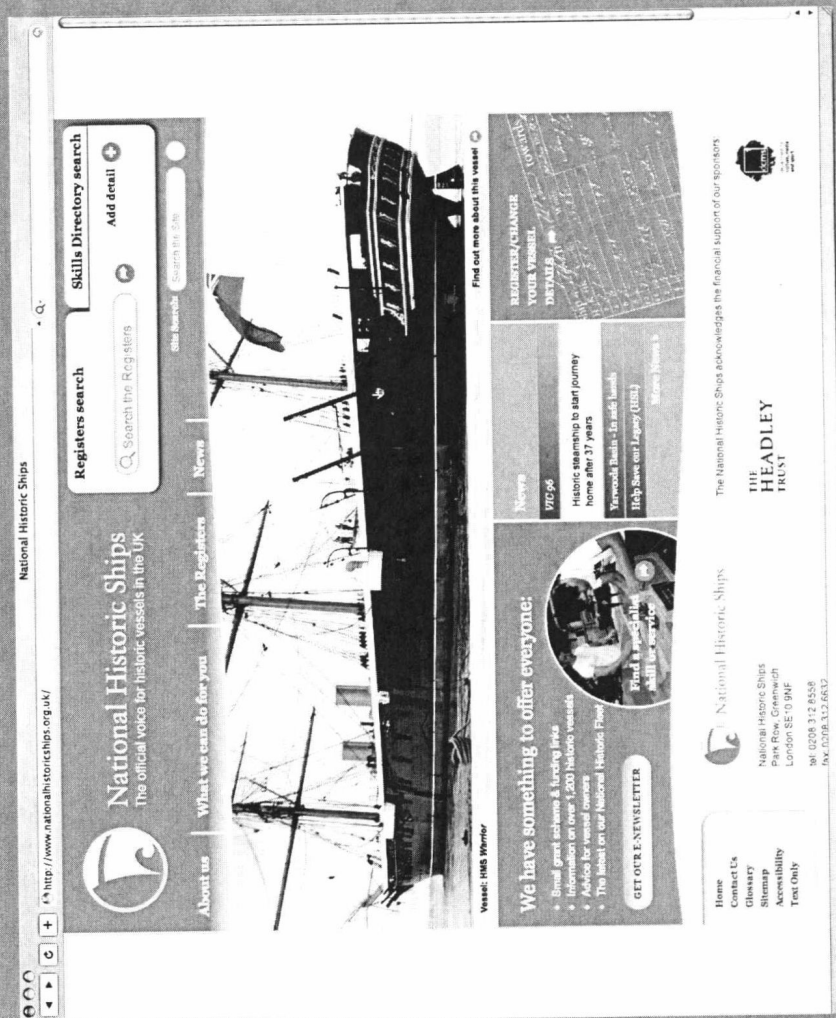
**Policy & Project Manager
National Historic Ships**



National Historic Ships
The official voice for historic vessels in the UK

What is National Historic Ships?

- DCMS funded
- Run by an Advisory Committee of 11 members
- Team of 4 paid staff
- Offices at NMM, Greenwich



www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk

National Register of Historic Vessels (NRHV)

Includes over 1,000 vessels which:

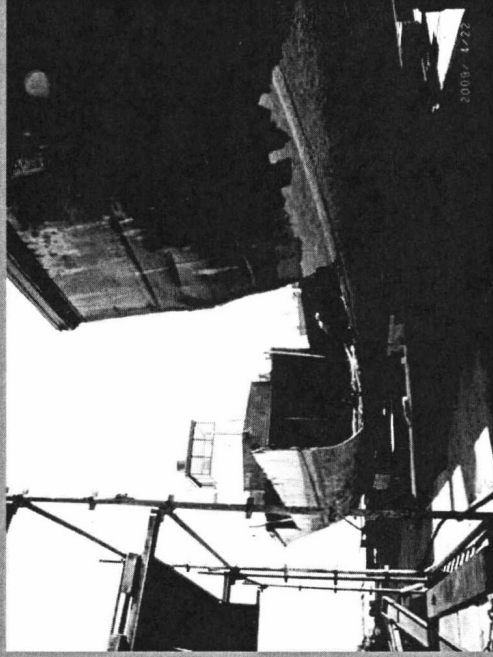
- are at least 50 years old
- have demonstrable and significant associations with the UK
- are based in UK waters
- are more than 33 ft (10.07 metres) in length overall
- are substantially intact



Lack of protection and recognition for vessels on the National Historic Fleet

- Draft Heritage Protection Bill 2008
- *MV Wincham*

Merseyside, estuarial coaster
Member of the National Historic Fleet



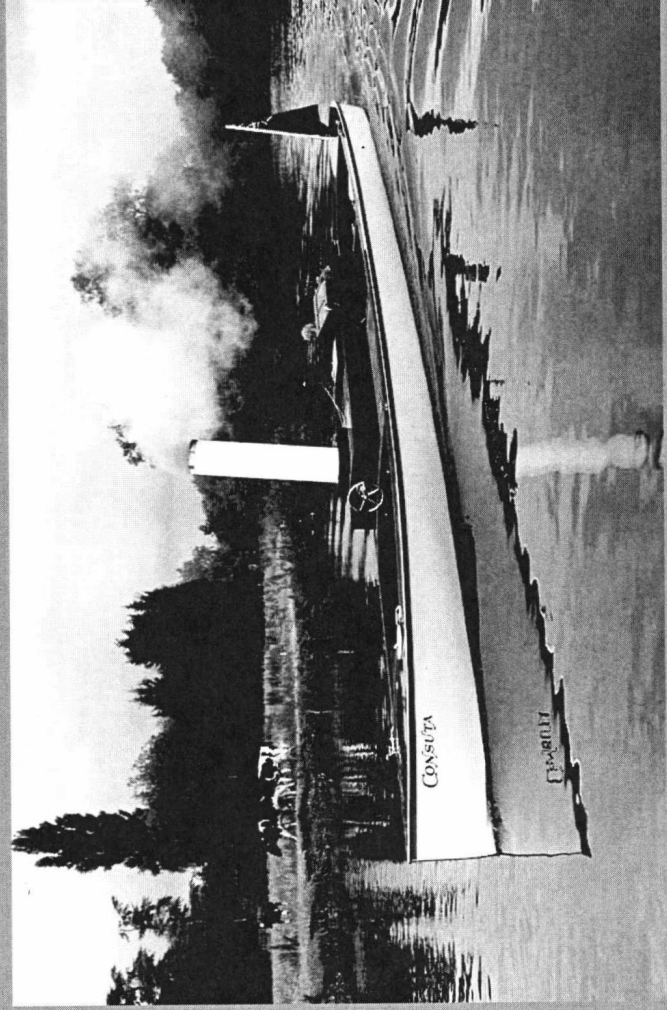
Scrapped in May 2009 due to
management issues

Repairs needed costing only
£15,000 - £40,000

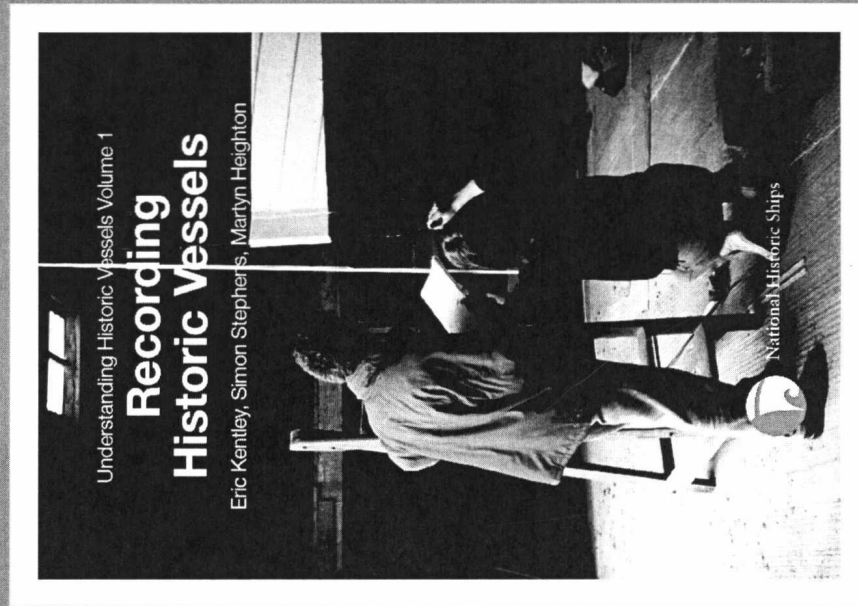
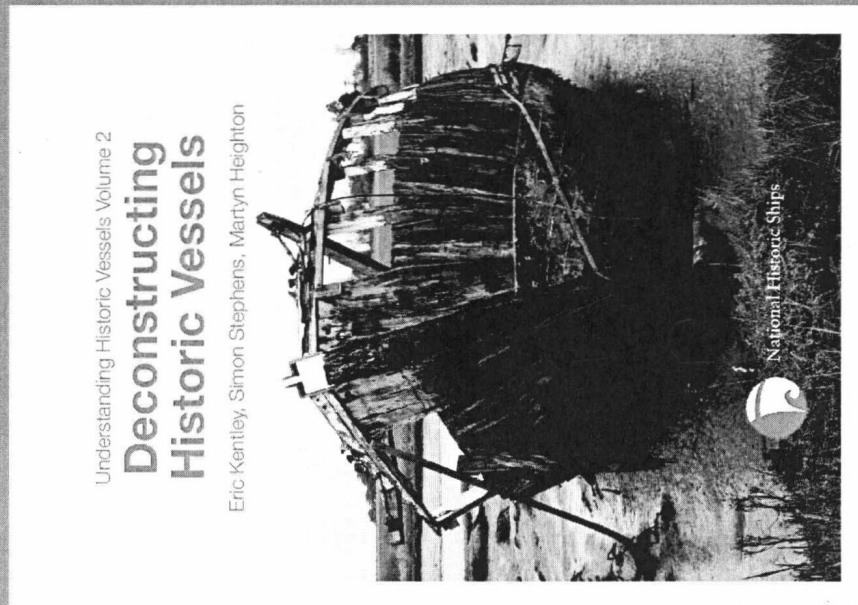
Recent Government consultations:

- Vision Statement for the Historic Environment
- Planning Policy Statement 15: Planning for the Historic Environment

- Steam launch *Consuta* and opposition from planning authorities to proposals for a floating base



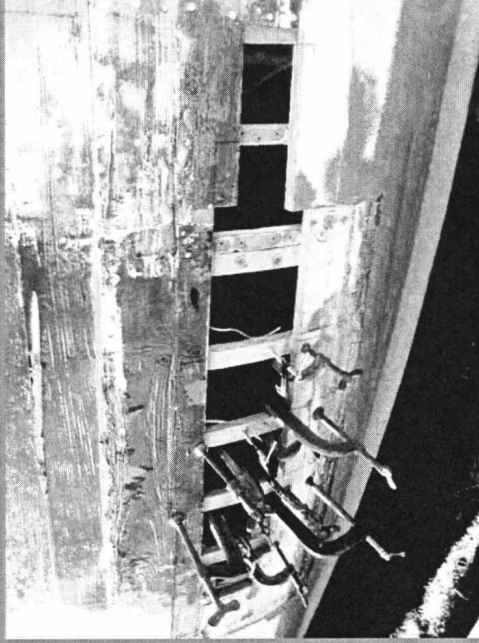
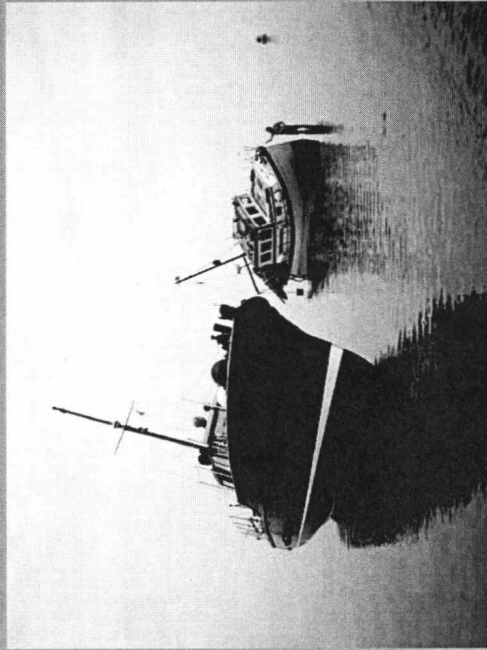
Understanding Historic Vessels



Funding for Historic Vessels

National Historic Ships: Small Grants Scheme

- available to all owners of vessels on NRHV
- covering training, conferences & sustainability
- £2,000 or 50% of costs (whichever is the lesser)
- £150,000 to be dispensed by 2011



Additional Sources of Funding

- Heritage Lottery Fund
- PRISM Fund
- Potential Sources of Funding spreadsheet
- Endowment Fund

