



RESCUE

The British Archaeological Trust

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The Rt. Hon. Michael Fallon MP
Secretary of State for Defence
House Of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

20th January 2015

Freedom of Information Request: HMS Victory

Dear Mr. Fallon,

I am writing to you on behalf of RESCUE - The British Archaeological Trust. RESCUE is a non-political organisation dedicated to supporting archaeology and archaeologists in Britain and abroad. We do not receive any state support and are entirely dependent on the contributions of our members to support our work. Details of our activities can be found on our website; www.rescue-archaeology.org.uk

On the 24th October 2014, the Ministry of Defence announced that it had come to a decision regarding the future of the HMS Victory following the period of monitoring outlined in the 2011 report produced as a result of a public consultation on the issue. The MoD revealed that a project design for a mitigation strategy for the site had been developed in conjunction with the Maritime Heritage Foundation, that conformed both to the key principles of the UNESCO 2001 *Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Heritage* and with the Government's own heritage policies. The next stage of work – as announced - would be for the recovery of "at-risk surface items" in accordance with this project design, that consideration of further phases of work will be made in the light of the results, and all that recovered artefacts would be declared to the Receiver of Wreck, and managed as part of something called the "Victory 1744 Collection".

The full Project Design has still not been made available. A summary, available on the project website <http://www.victory1744.org/> indicates that all artefacts will be made available in exhibition form and that phased excavations will be undertaken to enable the implementation of *in-situ* preservation for the "exposed hull remains". A series of "Key Management Principles" are also set out, which include the production of regular detailed reports, avoidance of unnecessary disturbance of any human remains, and assurances regarding the treatment of recovered objects and their maintenance as a collection.

RESCUE representatives have made repeated requests for further information to the project website (as it invites us to do) in order to understand the proposals for the HMS Victory investigations more fully, but have not received any responses. Therefore, under the terms of the 2000 Freedom of Information Act, we would like to enquire as to the following:

- **Why has the Government now accepted the principle of "Surface Artefact Collection"?** The Government's stated view in the 2011 consultation response was that the case for ongoing damage to the site by commercial fishing was, in their view, "insufficiently proven", and that the option for surface collection of artefacts and *in-situ* management was the least favoured of respondents to their consultation. Why has this position now reversed?

- **Has new information been made available about the condition of the wreck to alter the Government's previously stated position?** If so, where has this been published, and can a copy be supplied to RESCUE?
- **Can you supply a full and complete copy of the project design.** The decision to proceed with this project has been made on the basis of a project design that has not been made available to the public. The summary on the project website indicates that the MHF is committed to an “exemplar research and rescue-oriented mitigation initiative” – we would like to examine the project design to confirm this to our professional satisfaction.

We look forward to your response,

Yours Sincerely,

Reuben Thorpe,
Chair,
RESCUE: The British Archaeological Trust