

# WRECK DIVING

**W**RECK DIVING is one of the most popular types of diving world-wide, but it is particularly popular in the UK where a combination of wars, bad weather, and human error have left the coastline strewn with wrecks, particularly from the First and Second World Wars. Modern wrecks are exciting to explore, make great habitats for fish and other aquatic life and are generally superb subjects for underwater photography. They provide some of our best diving sites.

Each wreck is part of our maritime heritage which can be fascinating to unravel, but may also carry potential hazards for the enthusiastic diver, as well as other considerations you may not have thought about.

**A scuttled vessel of the German High Seas Fleet with a salvage vessel, in Scapa Flow.**

# DON'T

## **Do get extra training**

The sea holds the remains of many tragedies, as the sinking of a vessel is often accompanied by the loss of life. Wrecks still claim lives – the lives of divers inadequately prepared for difficult dives. Exploring wrecks requires a very high level of experience and advanced skill training which is available from your diving organisation.



Martin Woodward

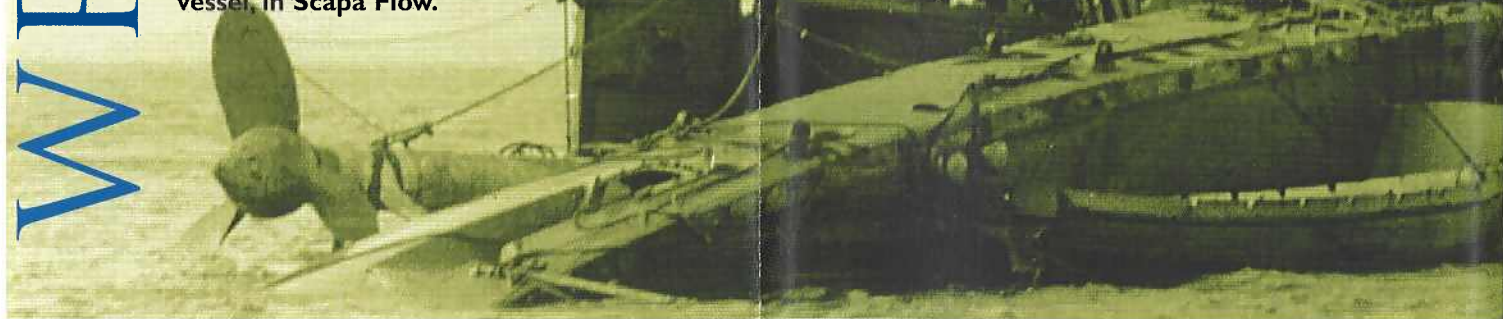
## **Do take care**

Wrecks may contain hazardous material, such as oil or munitions. Think of the danger into which

**Munitions on-board SS Luis which sank in 1918, IOW.**

you are putting yourself and others if you interfere with them or bring munitions ashore.

**REMEMBER IT IS A CRIMINAL OFFENCE TO ACQUIRE OR POSSESS FIREARMS OR MUNITIONS WITHOUT A LICENCE, EVEN IF THEY APPEAR TO BE OLD.**



# GET SCUTTLED



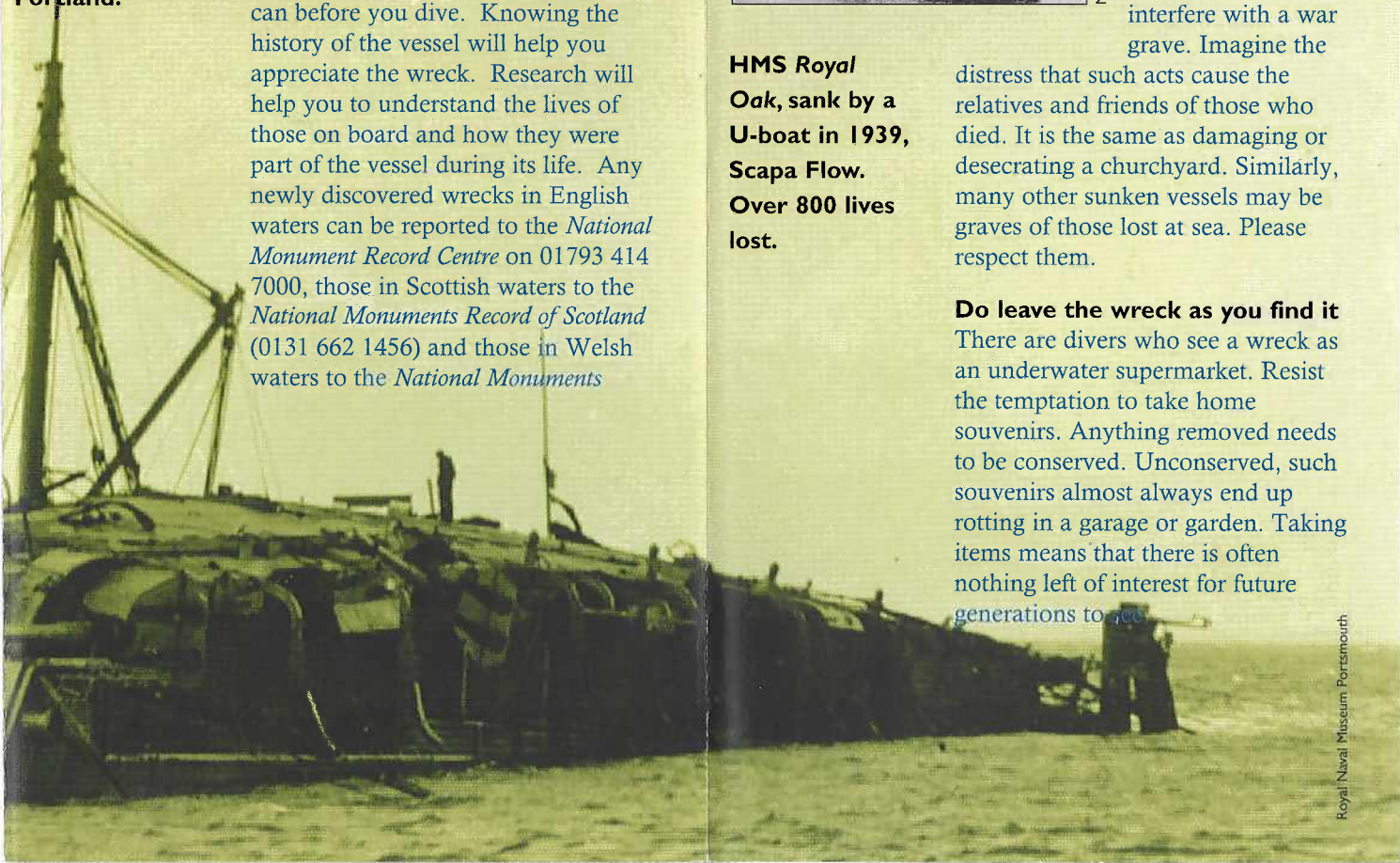
John Liddiard

**The engine room of HMS Hood, scuttled as a block-ship 1914, Portland.**

**Do observe and research**  
After safety, the greatest skill you can have is to be observant. Even experienced divers can miss important details about a wreck. Try to absorb every detail when you dive and note them down soon after you surface. You will learn

more about the wreck each time you dive on it.

Preparation and planning for any dive is important and so try to find out as much about the wreck as you can before you dive. Knowing the history of the vessel will help you appreciate the wreck. Research will help you to understand the lives of those on board and how they were part of the vessel during its life. Any newly discovered wrecks in English waters can be reported to the *National Monument Record Centre* on 01793 414 7000, those in Scottish waters to the *National Monuments Record of Scotland* (0131 662 1456) and those in Welsh waters to the *National Monuments*



Ministry of Defence

**HMS Royal Oak, sank by a U-boat in 1939, Scapa Flow. Over 800 lives lost.**

*Record of Wales* (01970 621 223). For navigational safety the *UK Hydrographic Office* (01823 337 900) needs to be informed about any dangerous wrecks.

## **Do respect the site**

Many wrecks of military vessels or aircraft are the last resting place of those who gave their lives while serving their country. It may be an offence to enter or interfere with a war grave. Imagine the distress that such acts cause the relatives and friends of those who died. It is the same as damaging or desecrating a churchyard. Similarly, many other sunken vessels may be graves of those lost at sea. Please respect them.

## **Do leave the wreck as you find it**

There are divers who see a wreck as an underwater supermarket. Resist the temptation to take home souvenirs. Anything removed needs to be conserved. Unconserved, such souvenirs almost always end up rotting in a garage or garden. Taking items means that there is often nothing left of interest for future generations to see.



John Liddiard

**Porthole of HMS Empress of India, sunk by gunnery practise 1913, Lyme Bay**

**Do observe and research**  
Perhaps the porthole that you 'discovered' was left by a caring diver for you to see and appreciate.

*Respect our wrecks* – they are not a re-newable resource. Important archaeological evidence can be lost if an object is removed without first recording its correct position. If you think that an object or wreck may be of historical importance, then leave it where it lies, mark its position and seek advice.

**Do protect the environment**

Wrecks are important habitats for marine life. Just as poor diving technique on coral reefs can be destructive, the same is true for wreck sites. Avoid damaging the habitat by carelessly touching with hands, knees and fins. Use available fixed shot-lines or, if you need to anchor, ensure that it is secured off the wreck. Leave the wreck as you found it.

Some divers are adopting particular wrecks for good reasons. Many divers undertake detailed structural surveys and historical research. Others study marine life and monitor changes of the wreck's ecology.



John Liddiard

**Encrusted marine life, including dead mans fingers, sponges and anemones**

**Do you know the law?**

Don't get caught out - know the law before you dive.

*The Protection of Wrecks Act 1973* regulates diving and salvage on designated historic wrecks. You must obtain a licence to visit or undertake work, including survey, from the controlling authority. The Act also prohibits diving on certain wrecks that are dangerous to divers.

*The Firearms Act 1968* prohibits possessing or acquiring munitions of all types without a licence.

*The Protection of Military Remains Act 1986* prohibits entering or tampering with wrecked military vessels and aircraft that are war graves.

*The Merchant Shipping Act 1995* requires any item of wreck removed from the sea to be reported to the Receiver of Wreck.

*The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974* applies to divers who remove items for commercial gain.

**Contravening any of these Acts is a serious offence - dive for fun, not a criminal record.**

**Do report to the Receiver of Wreck**

All wreck already belongs to someone. If you must bring something to the surface, you are required to report it to the Receiver of Wreck, so that its true owner can be found. You may be allowed to keep the object or you may be entitled to a reward for restoring it to its owner. For further information telephone the Receiver of Wreck on

