

**Briefing**  
**2 June 2016**

**The Heritage Alliance**

The Heritage Alliance is the largest coalition of independent heritage interests in England, bringing together over 100 mainly national organisations which are in turn supported by over 7 million members, Friends, volunteers, trustees and staff. Together they own, manage and care for, the vast majority of England's historic environment.

Our belief that significant benefits of heritage can be realised by governments, communities and individuals wherever that heritage may be found extends our interests beyond England. The Alliance co-signed a letter to the Rt Hon John Whittingdale in November 2015 (below) and is the only NGO represented on the Cultural Protection Fund Steering Board. At European level, we are also a member of Europa Nostra, took an active role in the partnership that published Cultural Heritage Counts for Europe in 2015 and we expect to take a leading role in the European Year of Cultural Heritage proposed for 2018.

**The Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Bill 2016**

The Alliance supported the Draft Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Bill in 2008 and regretted that the Draft Bill was dropped amid the financial crisis. The re-introduction has been welcomed in our popular news bulletin [Heritage Update 324](#)

The Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Bill is Intended to 'enable the UK to accede to the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its two Protocols', through the introduction of a number of measures. The main elements of it are:

- Introduction of offences designed to protect cultural property in the event of an armed conflict at home and abroad
- Introduction of the Blue Shield as an emblem that signifies cultural property protected under the Convention and its two Protocols
- Introduction of an offence of dealing in cultural property that has been illegally exported from occupied territory; provision for such property to be seized and returned to the occupied territory after the close of hostilities
- Introduction of immunity from seizure for cultural property in the UK which is being transported for safekeeping during a conflict between two or more other states.

Damage and loss of cultural property is an inevitable consequence of armed conflict. Either it is not regarded as important enough to include in pre-conflict planning or because it regarded as legitimate 'spoils of war'. It can become collateral damage or damaged through lack of military awareness. Subsequent looting is a loss not only to the host country but to us all.

Illicit trafficking encourages theft and damage to surrounding environments as well as loss of properly recorded provenance.

1. The Heritage Alliance welcomes the Bill as a means of mitigating any destruction of cultural property, intentional or not. This formal ratification is all the more urgent as military operations increase across the world. The destruction of cultural capital - the Bamiyan Buddhas and the Palmyra Arch - demonstrate that aggressors are following a long history of using cultural warfare to demoralise communities by destroying the symbols of their nationhood.
2. These and many other forms of cultural heritage are vital for social and economic benefit in post conflict recovery. This Bill will make sure that in the event of conflict the UK has in place plans to minimise damage to the cultural heritage of those communities we are trying to help, and thus enabling them to retain socially valuable, tangible reminders of their cultural identity around which those communities can repair in peaceful times. This legislation will support to the armed forces' ambitions to support local communities in the areas in which it is militarily engaged.
3. The UK has a world-wide reputation in the skills necessary to care for cultural property. We have one of the most professional and strategically thinking heritage communities in the world. This Bill will work with the UK's soft power and diplomacy agendas to position the UK as an international leader in demonstrating a supportive and facilitating approach to the protection of cultural property.
4. We welcome the £30m Cultural Property Fund for a similar reasons. We expect the Fund to support the skills and partnerships necessary to care for physical artefacts damaged in conflict or under threat but there should also be an organisational legacy. The UK is much envied for its long standing independent heritage movement that makes a significant contribution to national life. One of the outcomes of the Cultural Protection Fund should be to support and develop independent heritage organisations as an important element in re-establishing a post war civil society.

## Contact

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# THE BRITISH INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF IRAQ

(Gertrude Bell Memorial)

10 Carlton House Terrace  
London SW1Y 5AH, United Kingdom

Rt Hon John Whittingdale  
Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport  
November 2015

Dear Mr Whittingdale

## Ratification of the 1954 Hague Convention and the UK Cultural Property Fund

As representatives of some of the UK's leading cultural heritage organisations we, the undersigned, were delighted when last June the Government publicly announced its decision to ratify the **1954 Hague Convention** for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its associated protocols. This legislation will give enormous support to the Armed Forces' ambitions to support local communities in the areas in which it is militarily engaged.

We are also hugely supportive of the Government's intention to create a **Cultural Property Fund**, as announced in the same press release. In particular we endorse the proposal that has already been put to you by Peter Stone, UNESCO Professor of Culture Property Protection and Peace at Newcastle University, Chair of the UK Committee of the Blue Shield and cultural property advisor to the UK Government during the Iraq War of 2003.

He recommends that the Fund be concentrated on five areas of activity, namely:

- A **co-ordination centre**, with a staff of three or four, to act as a practical hub for networking, liaison, and communication for the complex web of academic, NGO professional, governmental, and military expertise in the area, to ensure minimal reduplication of effort. This is, in our opinion, the **top priority for funding now**.
- Training** for individuals and organisations in the practicalities of Cultural Property Protection, facilitated by the co-ordination centre
- Developing and implementing procedures for **proactive protection** of Cultural Property for countries such as Lebanon, which are at under real risk, where proactive protection could be implemented now and from which international guidelines could be developed.
- Emergency response** protocols to deliver rapid, specialised assessment and initial conservation first aid to countries suffering from conflict or environmental disaster.
- Long-term support** for Cultural Property in post-conflict and post-disaster zones, such as post- earthquake Nepal.

We thank you again for all your efforts to make the UK a leader in international Cultural Property Protection and look forward to concrete news soon of the parliamentary schedule for ratification, and of the budget and remit of the Cultural Property Fund. We would be happy to be of assistance in any way we can.

Yours sincerely,  
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Chair of Council  
British Institute for the Study of Iraq

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Director

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