



**THE NATIONAL TRUST – SRI LANKA**  
**THURSDAY 28<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2021**

**Underwater War Heritage: World War I & II – Unravelling Deep Mysteries**  
**By Dharshana Jayawardena**

The 139th session of the monthly Lecture series of the National Trust will be delivered online on  
Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> October 2021 at 6.00 pm

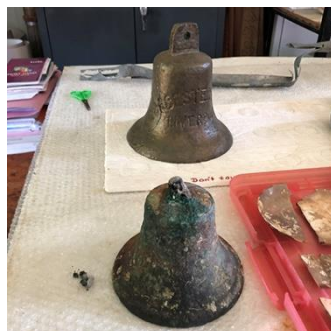
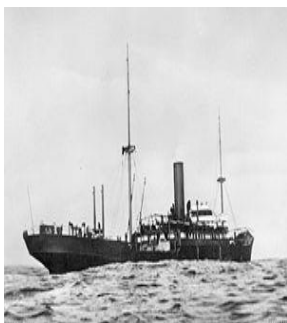
LINK: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89012203208>

In the last two thousand years, hundreds of ships have been lost at sea around the coast of Sri Lanka. The reason for these losses varies. Bad weather, human error and war casualties are a few examples. Today, just over 100 shipwrecks have been located but, in most cases, their identity remains a mystery.

In Sri Lanka the loss of ships and aircrafts as a result of World War I & II are low compared to ship losses by a multitude of other causes. As wrecks of this era are considered ‘contemporary’, there is less focus on investigating, documenting, and preserving World War wrecks in comparison to vessels considered of archaeological value. In fact, the Antiquities Ordinance only provides legal jurisdiction to relics or artefacts that existed before 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1815. Understandably, this raises a question, “what is the extent of the underwater war heritage in Sri Lanka?”.

The impact of World War 2 in Sri Lanka, specifically the actions of the Imperial Japanese Navy, culminating in the ‘Battle of Ceylon’ on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April 1942 (Easter Sunday Raid) and the 9<sup>th</sup> of April 1942 is comprehensively documented. The significant loss to the British Eastern Fleet resulted in many shipwrecks around the east coast of Sri Lanka. Relatively, the impacts of World War 1 in Sri Lanka are lesser known and hardly discussed. This again raises a pertinent question, “was there a naval or air force losses for this period?”

In this backdrop, the speaker will present details of expeditions to unravel the mystery origins of several World War I & II wreck sites in Sri Lanka. This session will provide an overview of some of the most important, yet little known shipwrecks around our island, introducing the audience to the remarkable maritime heritage buried deep beneath our coastal waters.



Dharshana Jayawardena is an underwater explorer and author of **Ghosts of the Deep – Diving the shipwrecks of Sri Lanka**. He discovered Sri Lanka’s first underwater cave system and solved the mystery origins of several vessels, including two World War 1 vessels, and a World War II aircraft lost at sea in the Indian Ocean. For his unique achievements, in 2019, he was recognized as the *Asian Explorer of the Year* by ADEX, an internationally renowned SCUBA convention held in Singapore. He has been diving for 20 years and is one of the few technical deep diving specialists in Sri Lanka, and the only Cave Diver in Sri Lanka. He collaborates with various Government institutions, such as the Maritime Archaeological Unit, Department of Archaeology, Department of Wildlife, Department of Tourism, and the Sri Lankan Navy on matters related to shipwrecks, shipwreck conservation, and technical diving. He also functioned as the technical advisor for the recent record-breaking deep dive by the Sri Lankan Navy, off Trincomalee.

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**The National Trust – Sri Lanka conducts monthly lectures on the last Thursday of each month at 6.00 pm. The lectures are open to the members and the public. The HNB Sustainability Foundation is the principal sponsor of the events of the National Trust – Sri Lanka.**

**Further information can be obtained from the Trust Office Tel 2682730 / 0777397403**