



The Military History Society of NSW Presents:
Sunk Warships, 1942: *HMAS Perth* & *USS Houston*

A lecture by Dr Natali Pearson, Sat 2 March 2019

The lightning advance of Japanese forces south to the Netherlands East Indies (Indonesia) in March 1942 spelt doom for two proud warships of the Allied navies.

Australia's HMAS Perth and America's USS Houston were attacked by Japanese destroyers and tragically sent to the bottom of the Sunda Strait separating Sumatra from Java.

In the decades since, these underwater wrecks have been the subject of expeditions, illegal salvaging and other cultural impacts, which have grown in scale over recent years.

Taking the history of salvaged bells from HMAS Perth (pictured) and USS Houston as a starting point, Dr Pearson will examine the meaning of protection and preservation in the case of underwater shipwrecks.

Should they be left undisturbed or is loss inevitable? Or should there be judicious intervention to remove symbolic objects from threatened warship wrecks?

Dr Natali Pearson is Deputy Director at the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre at the University of Sydney. Her research focuses on the protection, management and interpretation of underwater cultural heritage in Southeast Asia.

Image: HMAS *Perth*'s ceremonial bell, circa 1984, with other salvaged objects (courtesy David Barnett).

Time and Venue: Saturday, 2 March 2019, 2:00pm – 3:00pm, Goulburn Room, Level 4, City of Sydney RSL, 561-567 George Street, Sydney. Admission is free of charge but a gold coin donation would be appreciated.



Biography

Dr Natali Pearson is Deputy Director at the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre at the University of Sydney. Her research focuses on the protection, management and interpretation of underwater cultural heritage in Southeast Asia. Her research seeks to make an intervention in museological and heritage discourses by theorising underwater cultural heritage as worthy of critical scholarly attention beyond that afforded by the prevailing, maritime archaeological, perspective. By conceptualising underwater sites and objects as having agency, her research aims to expand popular curatorial approaches beyond tropes of treasure and pirates to a far broader understanding of underwater cultural heritage that accounts for the historicity and connectedness of the ocean and the material remains it contains.

Natali is co-editor of *Perspectives on the Past* at New Mandala (<https://www.newmandala.org/seasiapasts/>) and a regular contributor to *The Conversation*. Natali has completed a PhD on underwater cultural heritage in Indonesia (2018, USYD). She also holds a Master of Museum Studies (2013, USYD); a Master of Arts in Strategy and Policy (2006, UNSW); and a Bachelor of Arts (Asian Studies) with Honours Class One in History and Indonesian Studies (2002, UNSW). She has worked at the Asia Society's galleries in New York and Hong Kong, and as a consultant to the Asia Society Arts & Museum Summit. She is an alumni of the Australian Consortium for In-Country Indonesian Studies and the Asialink Leaders Program. Prior to this, she worked in Asia-focused defence and anti-money laundering / counter-terrorism financing roles in the Australian federal government.