Mary Rose Museum open to visitors on 31 May

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Located just metres from Nelson's flagship, HMS Victory and the ships of the modern Royal Navy, the new museum will provide one of the most significant insights into Tudor life in the world and create the new centrepiece to Portsmouth Historic Dockyard.

The Mary Rose is the only 16th-century warship on display anywhere in the world. The ongoing £35million heritage project to build the new museum and complete the current conservation programme on the ship and her contents has received £23m from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). The HLF has been an ongoing supporter of the Mary Rose and, in addition to its £23m investment has awarded a number of other grants totalling £9.5million over the past 18 years.

The opening marks 30 years since the hull of Mary Rose was raised from the Solent in 1982 and 437 years after she sank on 19 July 1545: when their world stopped, our story began. The ship sank in full view of King Henry VIII while leading the attack on a French invasion fleet during the Battle of the Solent.

The new museum finally reunites the ship with the many thousands of the 19,000 artefacts raised from the wreck. The excavation and salvage of the Mary Rose created a milestone in the field of maritime archaeology and remains the largest underwater excavation and recovery ever undertaken in the world. Each object in the new museum – from human fleas to giant guns – was raised from the seabed and carefully conserved through a groundbreaking process that is still ongoing.

The new museum, led by Wilkinson Eyre Architects (architect) and Pringle Brandon (interior design) was built around the hull of the ship. The building takes the form of a finely crafted wooden 'jewellery box' with the hull at its centre and galleries running the length of the ship, each at a level corresponding to a deck level on the ship. Artefacts are displayed in such a way to provide visitors with an insight into what these decks would have looked like moments before the ship sank.

Artefacts – including the skeleton of Hatch, the ship's dog – will also be arranged in galleries by theme to help reveal some of the personal stories of life on board. Examples include:

- **Meet a carpenter, cook and an archer** – find out more about members of crew and their associated unique objects found with them as well as their own personal belongings, see their faces revealed for the first time
- **Life on board** – see fine pewterware of the officers, musical instruments, books, accessories and clothing through to simple leather sandals, nit combs and even rat bones as hundreds of objects are laid out to be explored
- **Realities of life** – Through DNA research, precise reconstructions and through the careful use of human remains, the harsh reality of Tudor life is revealed – including the skeleton of an archer with the repetitive strain of pulling huge longbows still etched on his bones

The historical context of the ship is set and the mystery of why she sank explored. The Mary Rose, one of the first ships able to fire a broadside, was a firm favourite of King Henry VIII. Her first battle was in 1512 and her then captain noted she was 'the noblest ship of sail'. When she sank on 19 July 1545, she had just fired a broadside and was turning. Theories range from French fire to her being overweight with cannon and troops. Her loss, and that of the estimated 500

crew (no more than 35 survived) was witnessed by the King from Portsmouth's Southsea Castle and deeply troubled the nation.

The science behind the ongoing conservation work and underwater tales of salvage are highlighted, detailing the world leading archaeology pioneered through the care of the ship and the painstaking work to discover more about Tudor life.

Portsmouth Historic Dockyard hosts over 70,000 children each year and the new Mary Rose Museum contains a wide range of family focused activities including finding out how strong the men were to pull a longbow or lift a pike; the opportunity to handle replica artefacts and enjoy special demonstrations that will run frequently with costumed interpreters.

The pioneering building design has created a special environment to protect the unique and priceless 16th-century artefacts and hull, and also display them in a manner that enables visitors to experience the ship in the best possible way. Conservation work on the hull is in its final phase in a 'hot box' with fabric ducts directing, in a highly sophisticated pattern, dried air at exact temperatures across all parts of the hull. Visitors will be able to see the hull through a series of windows giving different aspects over, and around, the ship. Once drying is complete in four to five years time, the internal walls will be removed and the hull will be viewed through nothing but air – further enhancing the visitor experience and the connections between the hull and the artefacts.

The ongoing work with the hull and care of other artefacts requires visitor numbers and the environment to be carefully controlled. In order to achieve this tickets for the museum are time and date stamped. Visitors choose the time and date of their visit and can plan their day in Portsmouth and the Historic Dockyard visiting the Mary Rose Museum at the time on their ticket.

Visitors can explore the Mary Rose's connections across the historic city of Portsmouth. Not only was the ship built in the dockyard where she now rests, many of her 500 crew would have lived locally, the grave of the Mary Rose Sailor is at Portsmouth Cathedral and King Henry VIII watched her sink from Southsea Castle.

John Lippiett, Chief Executive of the Mary Rose Trust, said: "The new Mary Rose Museum marks a new and exciting chapter in the history of the Mary Rose, providing an astonishing resource for the world to learn about the Tudors and a centre of excellence for maritime archaeology and conservation. The museum is testament to all those who have worked so hard on this remarkable [42] year project to locate, salvage and conserve the ship and her contents. We look forward to welcoming the first visitors through the door on 31 May."

Lincoln Clarke, Chief Executive of Portsmouth Historic Dockyard, said: "The Mary Rose being lifted from the waters of the Solent in 1982 was a moment of national pride. Thirty years later, and through pioneering British conservation, engineering and design we have a new museum that provides the world with a treasure trove of Tudor history. The Mary Rose was built in Portsmouth 500 years ago and now, through the museum, she confirms Portsmouth Historic Dockyard as the place to explore British naval history and further establishes the dockyard as a major international visitor destination – with all the benefits this brings to local people and the city."

Dame Jenny Abramsky, Chair of Heritage Lottery Fund, said: "The drama of the day the Mary Rose was raised from the depths of the Solent is forever seared in my memory – the most significant archaeological find in our nation's maritime history. Right from the start the Heritage Lottery Fund has worked closely with the Mary Rose Trust on this groundbreaking project to reunite the 500year old warship with thousands of artefacts telling her story. It's incredibly exciting that, after much painstaking conservation work, the Mary Rose is finally ready to go back on show in a wonderful new space where she will undoubtedly wow all who come to visit."

Historian Dan Snow, and ambassador for the new museum said: “The story of the Mary Rose has fascinated people for generations. This tremendous new museum, housing together for the first time the hull of the ship and its many treasured artefacts, will give us a sense of what life was like on aboard a Tudor ship like never before, helping to preserve the history of the Mary Rose for generations to come.”

Notes to editors

Portsmouth Historic Dockyard is the leading attraction on the South Coast. The site is home to the Mary Rose, HMS Warrior 1860, HMS Victory, National Museum of the Royal Navy, Action Stations and Harbour Tours, providing an unrivalled, 800 year history of the British naval story.

The primary aim of Portsmouth Historic Dockyard is to generate income and channel it back into the site and its attractions 'for the purposes of educating the public, to promote and assist in the display, understanding and enjoyment by the public of the ships, buildings, land and docks in the Historic Dockyard.'

Further information

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