

Support for conservation of spritsail barge Centaur

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The project which starts in August will restore the wooden planking on Centaur's bottom to its original thickness after nearly 118 years of sailing in the Thames Estuary and East Coast rivers. The project is planned for completion by early 2014.

SB Centaur, a Thames spritsail barge, built in 1895 in Harwich, Essex is one of the oldest surviving wooden barges. This project will allow the trust to continue to operate her for the use of local groups and members of the general public, giving those that sail with us some experience of the way these iconic 19th-century cargo vessels were worked in the East Coast's rivers and estuaries. The work will allow some trainee shipbuilders to extend their skills to larger wooden vessels. The project will also provide opportunities for volunteers, youth organisations and schools to research the early history of Centaur and to use modern media and displays to share their output with the wider public.

Roger Newlyn, Trustee and Chair of the Thames Sailing Barge Trust, said: "We're delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund has given us this grant. SB Centaur carried bulk cargoes on the Thames Estuary and the rivers of Essex, Suffolk and Kent for over sixty years and these days she is central to the trust's aims of passing on to the next generation the traditions of sailing and maintaining these iconic east coast vessels.

John Whittingdale, MP for Maldon, said "It is marvellous news that the Heritage Lottery Fund is backing the Thames Sailing Barge Trust to conserve SB Centaur. This will not only help to preserve a wonderful old Thames barge but will help to keep alive traditional shipbuilding skills. I hope that as a result many more generations of young people will have the opportunity to spend time aboard this historic vessel.

Explaining the importance of the HLF support, Robyn Llewellyn, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund East of England said, "I am pleased that this grant will enable the Thames Sailing Barge Trust to restore SB Centaur. This exciting project will bring the history of this vessel to the local community and offer the chance to get involved in conserving and protecting the boats, while learning many new skills in the process."

Notes to editors

The Thames barge was designed as a cargo vessel with a flat bottom to sit on the river bed at low water. When Centaur was constructed she was built with two layers of bottom planking, a two inch inner layer and a one inch sacrificial outer layer.

The purpose of the sacrificial layer is that it protects the inner layer of the hull planking, taking the wear that occurs in the course of normal activity when the barge is on a beach or river bank, sitting on her bottom, plus taking the daily scouring of the hull by the tide.

Following 118 years of working in this manner the sacrificial planking fore and aft is wearing thin and needs replacing.

The Thames Sailing Barge Trust aims to conserve and maintain the Thames Barge Centaur for the public benefit, as part of the maritime heritage of Great Britain. The best way to achieve this is to keep sailing Centaur and offering that experience to the wider public.

The trust also aims to improve the understanding of the public as to the historic and cultural role of Thames sailing barges in the heritage of Great Britain and to promote and teach the practice and the traditions and skills of seamanship involved in the handling and maintaining of these craft by taking people sailing in the waters traditionally sailed by these craft. For further information, view the [Thames Sailing Barge Trust website](#).

Further information

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