Naval College oral history project gains Lottery



Cadets learning the principles of seamanship in the 1950s Britannia Museum Trust

The Britannia Museum Trust Oral History Project will gather first-hand accounts of life as a naval officer cadet between 1930 and 1980. The Britannia Association, the College Alumni organisation, has also contributed a substantial sum to the project.

This will be the first oral history recordings at the college and will involve the gathering of former cadets' memories of what they did; what they wanted to do; what they believed they were doing at the time and how that influenced their future career and decisions.

The aim of the project is to prepare audio and video archives, DVDs, a website and accompanying literature from the officer cadets' testimony, who after training at BRNC, went on to command naval battles from the Second World War, through to the Gulf Wars.

Commander Rob Dunn, the Commander of BRNC and Chairman of the Britannia Museum Trust, said: "Oral history is an established and legitimate area of historical study. Subjectivity is as much the business of history as the more visible 'facts'. We are grateful to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the funding which will help bring this exciting project to fruition. We will involve volunteers from the community, students from local schools and from the Universities of Plymouth and Exeter to help with the project."

The interviewers, all local volunteers, will be trained by a British Library expert. The oral histories alongside photos, letters and records, will give context to the items already in the Britannia Museum, located at BRNC, speaking to today's audience through the themes of courage, discipline, relationships and war.

The records obtained from the ex-cadets, some now as old as 80 and 90, will contribute to the BRNC and national archives and relate to the current Royal Navy officer training.

Nerys Watts, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South West, said: "The Britannia Royal Naval College has been at the forefront of naval officer training for over a century and countless cadets have begun their careers there. Now, thanks to money raised by National Lottery players, their memories can be captured for the first time giving new audiences the chance to hear the true personal stories of the lives, hopes and futures of the young men and women who passed through.

Finally a mobile exhibition will be created which will firstly be displayed at the Britannia Museum, open to the public, and will then travel to interested institutions in Devon, the UK and abroad.

The trustees of the museum are in the process of appointing a project manager and education Officer to run the project. The Heritage Lottery Fund award and the Britannia Association contribution will contribute to the part time paid appointments.

Note to editors

Britannia Royal Naval College

The college has been at the forefront of the education and development of naval officers in Dartmouth since 1863. BRNC contributes to Defence by providing Initial Officer training, enduring leadership training, and support to Defence Diplomacy outputs through the training of international officers from over 21 nations. Underpinning all aspects of training remains the aim to deliver courageous leaders with the spirit to fight and win.

The Britannia Museum Trust

The Britannia Museum Trust is set up to promote public understanding of Britain's naval and maritime heritage, as a key element in the development of British history, culture, international relations and national identity. It also serves to instil a sense of identity and ethos in the young officers of the Royal Navy in the 21st century through the preservation and promotion of the heritage and history of Britannia Royal Naval College. To this end the museum and its officers have responsibility to conserve, research and exhibit permanently, or in rotation, the many artefacts and collections that are acquired, donated or, loaned to us, for the edification and for the benefit of the students and staff of, and visitors to, BRNC. Thus identifying the museum as a vital and essential part of local and national maritime history as well as being integral to the tradition and ethos of the Naval College and its mission to train and educate future naval officers.