Conservation project restores HMS M.33, the Royal Navy's only Gallipoli survivor

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On 6 August The National Museum of the Royal Navy (NMRN) will open HMS M.33 to the public for the first time in her history, following a distinctive and extensive conservation project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). Come the centenary of her launch, HMS M.33 will be the only First World War warship to allow visitors to walk her decks this year. HMS M.33 is positioned in No.1 Dry Dock at Portsmouth Historic Dockyard, alongside HMS Victory and the Mary Rose Museum.

HMS M.33 is the only surviving Navy ship from the ill-fated Gallipoli campaign, and as such, holds great historic importance. This is despite the fact she was constructed and sent into service so speedily that she did not even warrant a name. Fabricated in just seven weeks she was one of nearly forty "monitors" built in a rapid construction campaign following the outbreak of First World War. Although the Gallipoli Campaign claimed 100,000 lives of personnel from all round the world, M.33 was considered a lucky ship and, despite being showered by shell splinters, she suffered no casualties.

Whilst in service HMS M.33 housed 67 men and five officers for over three years. Starved of home comforts, the men lived in her 568-ton metal shell underneath two powerful and oversize 6" guns. With a top speed of just nine knots and a shallow draft HMS M.33 was not built for comfort or speed but to allow her to get close-in to shore and fire at targets on land.

The visitor experience surrounding HMS M.33 will be unlike that of any other historic ship. Visitors will have the unusual experience of descending six metres to the bottom of the dock, before stepping aboard the ship. Public access to the dry docks has previously been limited, but the opening of HMS M.33 will allow the museum to showcase an 1801 dock that put Portsmouth at the centre of the Navy's power. The platform at the base of the dock will allow an unseen and dramatic viewpoint of HMS M.33's bow, flat bottom and the dry dock itself.

The NMRN commissioned Ian Clark Restoration to conserve the fabric of the ship. Clark takes the approach of a fine art conservator working on a colossal scale. He and the NMRN agreed that their mission must be to accentuate what is original, so that visitors can see the hull and paint that went to Gallipoli. This is conservation in its purest form, allowing for the interpretation of the character of the ship without the addition of new paint or materials.

The NMRN and Hampshire County Council have worked as partners to develop the £2.5million 'Commemorating Gallipoli – the HMS M.33 Project', part of the NMRN's wider 'Great War At Sea 1914-1918' programme to mark the Royal Navy's First World War. A special exhibition, 'Gallipoli: Myth and Memory' opened in March 2015. The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) awarded £1.79million to the NMRN to restore and open HMS M.33 to visitors.

Sir Peter Luff, Chair of HLF, said: "The role played at Gallipoli by the Royal Navy and Monitor Class ships like M33 in protecting soldiers in the August 1915 landings is an incredible story of perseverance, endeavour and bravery. It has a personal meaning for me as my father and his two brothers served in Gallipoli. So I'm particularly grateful that, thanks to National Lottery players, M33 is now open in the campaign's centenary year and people can experience first-hand the conditions in which the men aboard lived and fought."

Ian Clark and his team have worked to consolidate and conserve the original steelwork so to expose these original features. Later layers of paint have been painstakingly stripped back by hand, exposing the authentic and cracked paint surface below. This mammoth task has taken over 3,600 hours of work on the project and more than 275 litres of protective wax The treatment is tailored to each area of the ship in order to retain as much of the historic surfaces as possible, whilst also carefully removing ineffectual, modern surface treatments.

The unadorned interior of the ship lends itself to an original way of presenting the exhibits inside. Visitors will enter an immersive battle experience, powerfully evoking life aboard the vessel. The cavernous Engine Room will house a digital projection of the Gallipoli Campaign unfolding,that is projected directly onto the historic hull. This dramatic presentation sites alongside restored areas which give an authentic impression of 1915, allowing visitors to engage with the history of the vessel, as well as the stories of those who lived on board.

Matthew Sheldon, Project Director, said: “HMS M.33 is a small ship but has a big history. It will be wonderful to open the ship to visitors this year on her centenary – finally we’ll be able to share the story of her part in the Gallipoli Campaign, and reveal what it was like for the 72 crew who were crammed on board.”

The opening launch of HMS M.33 will be on 6 August 2015 and will be free to ticket holders. A large scale community event, local schools will be making sculptures to represent the fleet that served at Gallipoli, led by renowned artist Spencer Jenkins. The museum’s community team are also working with 3rd Gosport Sea Scouts to design banners with artist Stuart Shotton.

Notes to editors

Media previews will take place on the following dates:

- Tuesday 14 July
- Tuesday 21 July
- Thursday 23 July*
- Tuesday 28 July

Please register interest with Golden2 Consulting.

*Coincides with the America’s Cup World Series Portsmouth, which can be viewed from Portsmouth Historic Dockyard.

The National Museum of the Royal Navy

There are only three warships which survive today from the First World War: HMS M.33, HMS Caroline also owned by the NMRN and HMS President which is in private ownership.

Established in 2009, the NMRN tells the story of the four fighting forces of the Royal Navy; constituent members include the National Museum of the Royal Navy, Portsmouth (including HMS Victory); the Royal Marines Museum at Eastney; the Fleet Air Arm Museum, Yeovilton; the Royal Navy Submarine Museum and Explosion, the Museum of Naval Firepower in Gosport and HMS Trincomalee (Hartlepool). Affiliates include HMS Unicorn (Dundee); HMS Wellington (London); the Medusa Trust (Portsmouth); RML 526 (Rye); the Coastal Forces Heritage Trust (Portsmouth) and the D-Day Museum (Portsmouth) and ships under its care include HMS Caroline in Northern Ireland. Further information is available at National Museum of the Royal Navy website.

Heritage Lottery Fund

Other HLF-funded First World War projects include:

- First World War Galleries, Imperial War Museum London - £6.5m
- The Yorkshire Film Archive – £52,400
- HMS Caroline, the last surviving First World War battleship - £12m
- Herts at War -£98,400
- 1914 London B-type ‘Battle’ Bus, which drove out to the Western Front - £750,000

Ian Clark Restoration

Ian Clark Restoration provides pragmatic collection care solutions and informal industrial heritage consultancy. With over 30 years of experience Ian Clark and his team have worked on similar projects including HMS Alliance. For further background information visit the Ian Clark Restoration website.

Further information

For further information and images please contact Golden2 Consulting: Hermione Wace – hermione@goldensquared.com or Charlotte Hancock – charlotte@goldensquared.com.



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Robin Clutterbuck, National Coordinator of the Gallipoli Centenary Education Project (GCEP)



DBBC students researching Bolton soldiers who had died in the Gallipoli campaign



Bolton residents learning about the role local soldiers played in the Battle of Gallipoli



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HMS M.33 in dry dock

Lottery restores last two First World War ships