# New Mary Rose Museum celebrates national opening with major celebration

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The most comprehensive collection of Tudor artefacts in the world will be showcased – from personal belongings such as wooden eating bowls, leather shoes, musical instruments and even nit combs complete with 500-year-old lice through to longbows and two tonne guns.

For the first time crew members are being brought to life through forensic science: visitors can come face to face with a carpenter, cook and archer and even ‘Hatch’ the ship’s dog.

The launch event on 30 May was marked by the symbolic journey of the ship’s bell, the last artefact to be installed into the museum, and involved the Royal Navy, Royal Marines Band and museum supporters Dan Snow, Dr David Starkey and Sandi Toksvig.

The day-long event featured a host of museum ambassadors including historians Dan Snow, David Starkey and presenter Sandi Toksvig. Highlights included a wreath-laying ceremony at the wreck site, a flaming arrow volley by period-costumed Tudor archers from Southsea Castle (the place where Henry VIII watched the sinking of the Mary Rose) and a Tudor festival, culminating in a revealing of the new museum from behind a giant Tudor Standard flag, set to a fanfare from the Royal Marines Band.

The new Mary Rose Museum will open to visitors on 31 May 2013, at Portsmouth Historic Dockyard – the very same dockyard at which the warship was built over 500 years ago.

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

The Mary Rose is the only sixteenth century warship on display anywhere in the world. The ongoing £35 million 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). 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 year the hull of Mary Rose was raised from the Solent in 1982 and 437 years after she sank on 19 July. 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 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 ground-breaking process that is still ongoing.

For the first time, visitors will be able to see the facial reconstructions of seven members of the ship's crew based on forensic science and osteo-archaeology on their skulls and skeletons found at the wreck site. Faces will be displayed beside the crew members' personal belongings, providing an insight into their status, health and appearance.

The new museum, led by Wilkinson Eyre Architects (architect) and Pringle Brandon Perkins+Will (architect for the interior), 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 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 – are 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 unique objects found with them as well as their own personal belongings, see their faces revealed for the first time
- Life on board – see the fine pewter ware 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 is highlighted, detailing the world leading archaeology pioneered through the care of the ship and the painstaking work to discover more about Tudor life.

The ground-breaking building design has created a special environment to protect the unique and priceless 16th-century artefacts and hull, and also displays 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 4 to 5 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: “When the Mary Rose was raised from the muddy waters of the Solent in 1982, the founding members of the trust had a dream to put the ship and her contents into a permanent museum. It has been a long and difficult passage since then to achieve this aim. The technical challenges of conserving the hull and 19,000 artefacts have been very considerable, and the funding challenges equally so. The dedication and determination of those engaged in this vital project have steadily brought the dream into reality, and today marks a truly significant milestone in the ship’s 500 year history.”

Lincoln Clarke, Chief Executive of Portsmouth Historic Dockyard said: “The opening of the Mary Rose Museum is a great moment for Portsmouth, its completion both putting the city and its Historic Dockyard firmly on the map as the place to explore British naval history and further underpinning the area’s offering as a visitor destination. 500 years ago the Mary Rose was built in Portsmouth; today she continues to support people who live and work in the area by attracting visitors from around the globe.”

Bob Bewley, Director of Operations Heritage Lottery Fund, said: "The Heritage Lottery Fund has been a long-term supporter of the Mary Rose Trust and its work. Our major investment has helped convert years of painstaking archaeological endeavour into an amazing historical experience which is a fitting commemoration for all who lost their lives on that fateful day back in 1545.

"What I love about this new museum is that it brings to life the multiple stories of the sailors who lived and worked on the ship. Thousands of unique artefacts, so perfectly intact that it's almost impossible to believe they're over 400 years old, have been brought together under one roof for the first time. And thanks to the cessation of spraying on the hull, visitors can now see the vessel in all her glory. As one young visitor has already observed 'It's like walking into a history book'. What an absolute triumph!"

Historian Dan Snow, 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.”

Sandi Toksvig, comedienne and Chancellor of Portsmouth University said: “The new Mary Rose Museum is one of the most exciting history projects ever to open in the UK. It is so wonderful to see the crew that fated the ship honoured in such a wonderful way. As you walk through the length of the ship you don’t just see what life was like for a Tudor seaman, you feel as though you are experiencing it as well. At last the men of the Mary Rose can stand tall and tell us their story. It is a privilege to hear it.”

**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.'

**Heritage Lottery Fund and the Mary Rose Trust**: The HLF has been a supporter of the Mary Rose since it was established. In addition to its £23m investment towards the new museum and current hull conservation project, the HLF has also awarded a number of other grants totalling £9.5million over the past 18 years.

**Further information**

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