SS Robin to re-open doors to public

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Floating majestically above the water on a purpose built pontoon and the only ship to be displayed this way in the world, *SS Robin* returned home to her London birthplace last summer after a three year restoration programme. The HLF award will now see the final touches put in place to return this exceptional vessel to its former glory and create a new cultural landmark for London. A visitor centre will be housed within the pontoon, and an exciting programme of activities, events, training and volunteering opportunities kick-started for people of all ages.

One of only three National Historic Ships 'Core Collection' vessels based in London, alongside *Cutty Sark* and *HMS Belfast*, *SS Robin* is a coastal cargo steamer and one of 1,500 originally built between 1840 and 1956 at the renowned Thames Ironworks & Shipbuilding Company on the River Lea.

Being of international significance and the only surviving example of her type, she represents a pivotal moment in the history of industrialisation, engineering and technological development. The yard in which she was created was at the centre of engineering excellence in shipbuilding having produced such fine examples as HMS Warrior and Yavari among others.

Sue Bowers, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund for London, said: "*SS Robin*, to be moored in the Royal Victoria Docks, will serve as a living reminder of the capital's seafaring roots, history and traditions in an ever changing landscape regenerated for London's Olympic year. Visitors will also be able to gain a fascinating insight into the ships' past dating back to 1890 as her archive and collections of some 4,000 items including original documents, maps, plans, and navigation tools are made publicly accessible for the first time."

In addition to capital works, which include conservation of the engine room and crew accommodation, physical dockside access and historical interpretation within the pontoon and vessel, the visitor centre will provide dedicated workstations, video diary booths and research spaces so that the public can make full use of *SS Robin*'s archives and collections.

A schools programme, an 'overnight experience' offering groups the opportunity to sample seafaring tasks aboard the historic ship first hand, a community events programme and a 'Captains of Tomorrow' scheme devised to train volunteers in heritage conservation will mean that people of all ages will be involved in and learn about the remarkable history of this historic ship.

Nishani Kampfner, CEO & Co-Founder of the SS Robin Trust, explained the importance of HLF funding for the historic ship: "Securing HLF funding was absolutely critical for the Trust and we are delighted with the grant award. The grant will provide much needed financial support to ensure that *SS Robin* re-opens to the public in her new evolved role of heritage site and training centre. The funding will be used to create an authentic and memorable experience for visitors which will include exploring and opening up the hidden and fascinating stories of London's shipping and seafaring roots onboard *SS Robin*, the world's oldest complete steamship.

"The grant will also be used to greatly improve access, including disabled access for the first time, and conserve the original features and interior spaces of this 19th century London-built historic ship. A new programme of activity will be delivered including a wide range of volunteering and training opportunities. The HLF award is a wonderful recognition of the importance of this country's Merchant Navy, and the contributions made by the capital's tough, inventive and

adaptable seafarers, past, present and future."

Newham Mayor, Sir Robin Wales, said: "This is fantastic news. East London is the future of this great capital and this magnificent ship is a symbol of the Docks' powerful resurgence. London's Olympic bid book said the most enduring legacy of the Games must be the regeneration of the entire community for the direct benefit of everyone who lives there. For centuries London's East End has been one of the poorest areas in Europe. The Games have provided a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to transform the lives of residents for generations to come. The Docks represent a crucial part of the borough's physical and social regeneration as we approach London 2012."

Sir Robin added: "We want our residents to have the same opportunities and aspirations as people living elsewhere in the capital. The regeneration here in Newham will provide our residents with a living environment of which they can be proud."

Finally, keen supporter Jim Fitzpatrick MP and Patron of the *SS Robin* said: "This is great news for the Robin and for those who believe in protecting our maritime heritage. The HLF money will allow visitors to get close to our maritime history at close quarters and admire the beauty and functionality of one of our real treasures and the only Grade I vessel actually built in London."

SS Robin will be visible to visitors attending sports events at the ExCel Exhibition Centre, hosting a number of sports events during the Olympic and Paralympic Games, and capital works are expected to be complete by late 2012.

Notes to editors

* The HLF grant to the project SS Robin Open Doors Project is for £954,500 (77% of project costs) and is a second-round pass, which means it is a confirmed award.

SS Robin Trust
The Trust's core vision is that the UK's maritime heritage belongs to us all, across generations, socio-economic and ethnic groups. *SS Robin* is emblematic of the birth and growth of international global trade and the diversity of modern day civilisation. By conserving and understanding the lessons of our ancestors as well as our collective past we learn to adapt and progress, giving new generations essential skills for their future success.

The project has established an excellent reputation for its innovative and ambitious learning programme, centred in an original heritage space. The particular success of the Trust's programme of pilot workshops has been to attract audiences not normally associated with an interest in heritage.

The Trust believes that drawing analogies with the experiences of pioneering seafarers is key to attracting different communities to engage with our maritime past, and will continue to explore creative and visual ways to interpret and encourage the heritage experience and learning activities onboard *SS Robin*.

Further information

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