£11.5m Lottery grant to transform last surviving Battle of Jutland ship

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The Heritage Lottery Fund has confirmed the award of £11.5million to the National Museum of the Royal Navy (NMRN) and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) to conserve, interpret and display HMS Caroline, the lone survivor of the 1916 Battle of Jutland.

The grant means plans to transform the historic ship, whose home has been Belfast Harbour for 90 years, into a world class heritage visitor attraction in time for the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Jutland on 31st May 2016 can now go ahead.

Visitors will experience the many different lives of the ship. Starting as a “Greyhound of the Seas”, HMS Caroline’s job was rapid intelligence gathering and reporting back to command. After she arrived in Belfast in 1924 the ship began a new life as a drill ship for the Royal Naval Reserve and then served as a command centre during the Second World War. All these aspects will be uncovered and interpreted. Highlights of the ship’s visits will be the bridge with its original compasses and telegraphs, the engine rooms with four Parson’s turbines still in position and many other aspects of the ship’s living quarters which have remained unchanged in 100 years.

Minister for the First World War Centenary, Helen Grant, said: “This is wonderful news. HMS Caroline has had a long and distinguished career, starting of course in the First World War. It is beyond doubt an important part of our island history, and it’s great that the Heritage Lottery Fund have been able to support its restoration in this Centenary year so that it can continue serving, in a different role, for many years to come.”

Carole Souter, Chief Executive of HLF, said: “As we mark the Centenary of the First World War, people across the UK are learning more about how it changed millions of lives. This Lottery grant will restore and open up HMS Caroline, and enable future generations to explore the incredibly important, yet often lesser known, role played by those who served in the Royal Navy during this momentous conflict.”

Captain John Rees, NMRN’s Chief of Staff and Chairman of the HMS Caroline Project Board says time is of the essence to deliver the restoration.“DETI and the NMRN have worked particularly hard to achieve this success and our partnership has been exceptionally effective,” says Captain Rees.

“The support and help we have received from the Heritage Lottery Fund has been simply first rate and I am thrilled that the funding is now in place and that we can now get on and deliver a world class attraction,” says Captain Rees.

Professor Dominic Tweddle, Director General of the National Museum says: “HMS Caroline is quite simply one of the world’s most significant historic fighting ships and predates the partition of Ireland. To conserve the ship and open it to the public as a shared space, museum and cultural hub in Belfast is hugely significant to the people of all Ireland.”

Minister for the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Arlene Foster said: “HMS Caroline is part of the fabric of Belfast and an integral part of our maritime history so when the MoD threatened to scrap the ship in 2012, my Department and the NMRN worked tirelessly to prevent it from happening. My Department will be contributing an additional £2.7million in match funding to the project which is of outstanding national significance.

"HMS Caroline has huge potential as a visitor experience and will contribute to the wider physical regeneration of Titanic Quarter creating jobs during both the restoration phase, with the work being undertaken in Belfast, and when the ship opens to the public in 2016. Today's funding announcement is great news and the restored ship will be a tremendous asset for Belfast and will complement the existing tourist attractions in Titanic Quarter to give more for visitors to see and do."

Captain Rees sees HMS Caroline as a critical piece of the jigsaw that can turn the Titanic Quarter into a world class maritime heritage destination.

"We are branding HMS Caroline as "A Lone Survivor, A Living Legend". She is a jewel in the Titanic Quarter crown and adds enormous value to the unique visitor offer alongside Titanic Belfast, SS Nomadic, Pump House and the Thompson Dock. All this and the proposed developments for the H&W Drawing Offices offers a superb opportunity for tourism in Northern Ireland" says Rees.

Notes to editors

Built in Merseyside in 1914, HMS Caroline is the last survivor of the Battle of Jutland, the First World War's longest, most strategically important sea battle and the only time the full German and British navies engaged directly. A light cruiser, weighing 3,750 tons and 446ft long, when built she was technologically ground-breaking. It was her maximum speed of close to 30 knots that enabled the British Navy to respond to the increasing threat of long range torpedo attack on battleships, locating the enemy fleet and then rapidly carry news back to the British battleships.

When the war ended she became a static training ship based in Belfast. During the Second World War, HMS Caroline was back in action, acting as a key base for operations to protect the North Atlantic convoys from U-boat attacks. In 1945 she returned to her role as a static drill ship in Belfast until decommissioned in 2011, making her the longest ship in commission in the British Navy after HMS Victory.

The most significant war ship of the 20th century still afloat, HMS Caroline is one of only 200 vessels in the National Historic Fleet. What is even more significant about her is that she is barely unchanged from the day she was constructed and is 80 per cent complete.

Further information

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