'Amazing survivor' acquired by National Museum of



The Fairmile RML497, pictured in 2013

Head of Heritage Development at the NMRN, Nick Hewitt, said: “I am absolutely thrilled that the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has supported us in acquiring RML 497. She’s an amazing survivor, full of original features and still fully operational, which is incredible for a wooden warship built for ‘hostilities only’ service during the Second World War.

“When she comes to Portsmouth she’ll be entering a whole new phase of her long life, and I’m sure our visitors will be just as excited as we are to step aboard her and see Portsmouth’s amazing naval heritage from the deck of a real warship.”

An HLF grant of £90,600 was secured for the project, with both the NMRN and the Coastal Forces Heritage Trust (CFHT) raising £5,000 each.

Stuart McLeod, Head of HLF South East, said: “This vessel's daring missions during the Second World War are a little-known part of the UK’s naval history. Thanks to National Lottery players, our investment will bring the best surviving example of a Fairmile B motor launch to Portsmouth, creating an exciting new attraction for the Historic Dockyard and ensuring the contribution of those who worked on this vessel is much better known.”

The Coastal Forces made an enormous contribution to the Second World War in every aspect of war, gathering vital intelligence and sinking enemy vessels were just two of her operational roles. CFHT's aim, as a charity, is to preserve the history of the Royal Navy's Coastal Forces.

Acting Chairman of the CFHT, Trevor Robotham, said: "The Trustees of the Coastal Forces Heritage Trust (CFHT) are delighted that RML 497 has been acquired by the NMRN.

"The Trust has contributed financially to the saving of the boat and will act as specialist advisers to the NMRN on its display to the public and on the wartime construction and use of this type of vessel.

Constructed to the same Fairmile Type B design as the Motor Gunboats and constructed by the same company, the boat is one of only a few remaining examples of this very famous wartime design."

RML 497 was sold off at Itchenor, West Sussex, after the war in 1947 and entered service with the Western Lady Ferry between Brixham and Torquay in that same year as Western Lady III.

During 2007 Western Lady III left South Devon but returned in 2009 when she was purchased by Greenway Ferry to once again grace the waters of Torbay and Dartmouth, carrying many thousands of passengers. She was renamed Fairmile and in 2013 was returned to her wartime colours.

Will Ford of Greenway Ferry said: "Fairmile has been a true passion for our company and we are sad to see her leave Torbay where she was seen by locals as a true icon of our sparkling waters – but those who truly care about this unique vessel will be over the moon that she is returning home and now part of the NMRN."

Captain Robotham added: "She will be a great asset to the maritime scene within Portsmouth Historic Dockyard and she will bring to the public a greater awareness of the quite magnificent role played by Coastal Forces in the Second World War."

The successful sale of RML 497 was brokered by Paul Singer of Yachting Brokers who were appointed as vessel brokers by specialist marine business agency, First Peninsula Marine acting in the sale of Greenway Ferry assets.

Director of Yachting Brokers, Paul Singer, said: "We are more than delighted to have more than achieved all of our objectives and to have played a part in the preservation of one of our nation's naval assets and to see her move onto such a prestigious new home."

RML 497 served with the 62nd ML Flotilla at Portland until January 1944. She then undertook anti-submarine target towing duties, in Kirkwall, before being sent to Appledore. She joined the 69th ML Flotilla at Felixstowe.

She was involved in a commando raid on the Channel Isles following D-Day. RML 497 played an active part during the Second World War rescuing downed airmen including other difficult and sometimes secretive roles.

RML 497 joins the NMRN fleet of world-famous ships, including Nelson's flagship HMS Victory and First World War Gallipoli survivor HMS M.33, and submarine HMS Alliance at the Royal Navy Submarine Museum.

Notes to editors

Noel Macklin, whose Fairmile company at Cobham produced specialised sports cars, recognised in the early period of the war the need for more advanced Coastal Forces craft. Those then operating in the Royal Navy at that time were

termed "short boats', being some 60 to 70 foot in length and limited in the armament they carried.

The Fairmile boats conceived by Mr Macklin were 115 foot in length, and some up to 119 foot, were better armed and a far more capable Coastal Forces craft.

Although this type of craft was very much needed by the Royal Navy as the war progressed it was not possible for them to be built in the Admiralty's very busy shipyards.

The designs were therefore spread around the small boatyards of the UK, which were well capable of undertaking the construction of these wooden hull craft. The Fairmile Coastal Forces craft, of which RML 497 is a perfect example, served in all areas of Second World War naval operations.

About the National Museum of the Royal Navy

The National Museum of the Royal Navy, established in 2009, tells the story of the four fighting forces of the British Royal Navy. Constituent members include the National Museum of the Royal Navy, Portsmouth (including HMS Victory and First World War Gallipoli campaign survivor HMS M.33); the Royal Marines Museum at Eastney, Portsmouth; the Fleet Air Arm Museum, Yeovilton, Somerset; the Royal Navy Submarine Museum and Explosion, the Museum of Naval Firepower, both in Gosport on the south coast of England and the UK’s oldest historic fighting ship still afloat, HMS Trincomalee in Hartlepool. Affiliates include HMS Unicorn (Dundee); HMS Wellington (London); the Medusa Trust (Portsmouth); 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 on the National Museum of the Royal Navy website.

Further information

PR Manager Jacquie Shaw on 02392 728 062 or Jacquie.shaw@nmrn.org.uk.

or PR Executive Lewis Brown on 02392 894 558 or lewis.brown@nmrn.org.uk.