

## NEWS RELEASE



### SHIP'S HEROES REUNITE FOR 40<sup>TH</sup> HOMECOMING ANNIVERSARY

For immediate release

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'SALVAGE heroes' are meeting for a celebratory reunion tea party – onboard ship – for the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ss Great Britain's 'homecoming' on July 19.

Most of the small band of dedicated men and women, responsible for saving the national treasure, will meet for the first time in 40 years. For some, it will be the first time they will have seen the ship, now in her original Dry Dock in Bristol, since 1970. Most are now in their 70s and 80s.

They range from divers, a marine officer, and film makers, to secretary of the Governor of the Falkland Islands. All share a deep emotional bond with the ship, now one of the UK's finest visitor attractions and named by Museum-iD as one of the world's top museums of the last decade <sup>[please see Notes to Editors]</sup>.

Sadly, for others, the anniversary has come too late. Ewan Corlett, a talented naval architect, who galvanised support for the salvage, died in 2005 – just days after conservation and restoration work was completed on the ship and the museum was 're-launched' as Brunel's ss Great Britain.

40 years ago, the ss Great Britain lay abandoned in the Falkland Islands, a popular destination for picnickers and mussel-hunters.

Working in extreme isolation, in harsh weather conditions, and with limited equipment, the salvage team raised the ship in just three weeks. It was an unforgettable, and often dangerous, experience for those involved. The rusting hulk – once the world's first great ocean liner – was refloated on to an enormous pontoon and towed almost 8,000 miles across the Atlantic Ocean. The ss Great Britain returned to a triumphant welcome, broadcast to the nation by television legend Magnus Magnusson, on July 19.

Over the last 12 months, the ss Great Britain Trust's museum staff and volunteers have gathered these memories through personal approaches, appeals through the media, a dedicated section on the Trust's website, and Memory Collection Postcards and Boxes.

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These have been sifted, with the best used for the Trust's website pages, a Twitter campaign, and for a beautifully-crafted animated documentary, made by the University of West of England's School of Creative Arts <sup>[please see below for examples of the memories gathered]</sup>.

The animation features the spoken memories of those who salvaged her and those who saw her return to Bristol. The film lies at the heart of 'The Incredible Journey' exhibition, inspired by a 1970s colour palette, with a timeline of salvage and world events – ranging from the discovery of North Sea oil to the first topless 'Page 3' model – and orange space hoppers dangling from the gallery ceiling. The exhibition opens to the public on 17 July. The animation will also be available on the Trust's website.

Those expected at the 'Reunion Tea Party' on July 19 include:

- Salvage divers Stuart Whatley and Lyle Craigie-Halkett (a native Falklander);
- Tug boat captain Ivor Boyce;
- Marines Officer Dr Malcolm Macleod OBE;
- Sarah Swanick secretary to the Governor of the Falkland Islands;
- Tony and (the then pregnant) Marian Morrison who were part of the film crew;
- The sons of Eric Gadd, an active publicist who made a fundraising record for the ship and refused to shave until her safe return;
- And spectator Kim Hicks who, aged 11, threw petals on to the ss Great Britain from Clifton Suspension Bridge.

Unfortunately those unable to make the reunion include Lord Strathcona, who represented the ss Great Britain Project in the Falkland Islands and Sir Jack Hayward, who underwrote the salvage operation, now both in their 80s, Ray Sutcliffe who directed the BBC's documentary for the Chronicle series, and the German salvage team.

The idea for the 'Reunion Tea Party' was inspired by the deckhouse which Lord Strathcona built on the ship as a shelter for the divers, and was affectionately dubbed 'The Strathcona Arms' or 'Das Tee Haus' – until it was destroyed by a falling mizzen mast.

The ss Great Britain Trust's Director of Museum and Educational Services Rhian Tritton commented: "The 'Reunion Tea Party' is our opportunity to thank all those involved in the original salvage operation. We are indebted to their vision and determination in bringing home this national treasure, against all the odds. It was an extraordinary feat, the most ambitious salvage of any historic ship ever undertaken.

"The Trust is grateful to all those who have shared their eye-witness memories and personal records of these events, and to the volunteers for their invaluable help in interviewing those involved for 'The Incredible Journey' oral history project, film and exhibition.

"What has been achieved is a remarkable re-telling of a remarkable story. The quality of the exhibition, the animated documentary, family trails, and the online materials, reflects the significance and spirit of the original salvage.

“We hope that our guests and visitors enjoy the exhibition and trails as much as we do!”

Highlights of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, which start July 17, include:

- ‘The Incredible Journey’ exhibition;
- A stunning animated documentary, re-telling the epic salvage and return;
- Fun family trails, where visitors are challenged to become ‘salvage heroes’;
- ‘The Incredible Journey’ talks from volunteers;
- Goggle-making children’s workshops, inspired by the divers from the salvage.

'The Incredible Journey' animated film is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Knowledge Catalyst award. The project has also received support from ss Great Britain Trust members, Ashton Gate Primary School, the Falkland Islands Museum, Falmouth University and the Oral History Society.

The ss Great Britain is the world's first propeller-driven, iron-hulled, steamship, designed by Isambard Brunel, and launched in Bristol in 1843 as the world’s first great ocean liner. Following a successful career as an emigrant clipper, and cargo ship, in 1886 she was damaged in a severe storm and bought by the Falklands Corporation to use as a storage hulk, before being scuttled in 1937.

Today Brunel’s ss Great Britain is a multi award-winning museum and visitor attraction, attracting more than 170,000 visitors, schoolchildren and venue hire guests every year. Fully conserved and restored, the ss Great Britain now looks the same – above her glass ‘sea’ – as she did on the day of her launch on July 19, 1843.

- To view the trailer of the animated film visit [www.ssgreatbritain.org/movie](http://www.ssgreatbritain.org/movie) and follow the tweets on <http://twitter.com/1970Salvage>;
- To view the BBC Chronicle documentary ‘The Iron Ship’ please go to <http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/chronicle/8628.shtml>;
- Celebratory 40th anniversary events will take place from 17<sup>th</sup> July at Brunel’s ss Great Britain. For further details and other events please see [www.ssgreatbritain.org](http://www.ssgreatbritain.org).

#### **‘THE INCREDIBLE JOURNEY’ 1970 FACT FILE:**

- November 1967 Ewan Corlett’s letter in ‘The Times’ challenges the nation to save the ss Great Britain;
- 1969 ‘Union Jack’ Hayward agrees to fund the salvage attempt;
- January 11, Risdon Beazley and Ulrich Harms take on the salvage contract;
- March 25 1970, the salvage team arrives in Port Stanley, the Falkland Islands;
- April 7, the ss Great Britain floats for the first time;
- April 11, she is berthed on to the salvage pontoon Mulus;
- April 24, the ship leaves the Falklands;
- May 2, the ss Great Britain arrives in Montevideo, Uruguay;
- May 6, the world’s media descends to capture the start of the ss Great Britain’s incredible journey across the Atlantic Ocean;

- June 18 a RAF Nimrod flies over the ss Great Britain, pontoon and tug, in the Bay of Biscay;
- June 19, a photo taken by the plane is published in the Daily Express;
- June 23, she arrives in Avonmouth with an escort of smaller vessels carrying the media and well-wishers;
- July 1, she is floated from her pontoon;
- July 5, the ss Great Britain is towed up the River Avon (one day after the planned date);
- July 15, UK dockworkers vote to go out on strike, but in Bristol they agree to help bring the ss Great Britain into her berth;
- July 19, she returns to her Dry Dock (the same day and month she was launched by Prince Albert in 1843);
- The salvage operation was underwritten by millionaire Sir Jack Hayward.

#### **‘THE INCREDIBLE JOURNEY’ IN NUMBERS**

• Number of days from salvage to homecoming:	117
• Cost of salvage in pounds (1970):	175,000
• Number of crew on tug:	20
• Number of mattresses used to plug the ship:	Unknown!
• Age of ship at rescue in years:	127
• Date in July (1843 & 1970) she left and returned to her Dry Dock:	19
• The voyage number:	47
• Tonnage of pontoon:	2,667
• Exact nautical miles travelled (on her last voyage):	7,400
• Times ship and Clifton Suspension Bridge are seen together:	Once

#### **MEMORY EXCERPTS:**

- Lord Strathcona, who represented the ss Great Britain Project as part of the salvage team: ‘The German [salvage] team were all incredibly young... they were lead by a man called Horst Kaulen who was a tremendously can-do, aggressive, small chap... And the other amazing thing is that I never saw a hard hat in the entire operation and they all wore sandals, which struck me, in handling all this heavy equipment, wasn’t a very wise thing.’
- Horst Kaulen, German salvage expert: ‘Any salvage is more or less a risk, but you know it was a very old ship and it was cracked on one side.’
- Lyle Craigie-Halkett, salvage diver: ‘Stuart and I took a break... because we’d actually been on our feet for more than 48 hours... we were on the Varius having a nice big breakfast... Somebody says the Britain’s moving. We’d put out inadequate ropes on the shore... it could have all been over very sadly very quickly.’
- Stuart Whatley, salvage diver: ‘So it was good planning, good logistics, fantastic improvisation.’ ‘The ship was covered in mussels... eight or nine inches long, biggest mussels I’ve ever seen. The cook came along and collected bags full of them and we had them for tea, and... they were marvelous.’
- Ivor Boyce, captain of the tug boat John King: ‘It was just a mass of people... no traffic was moving, couldn’t move, the roads and everywhere was absolutely

packed... Even the diesel noise, you know, was overpowered by the people cheering and cars honking... It was very, very moving.'

- Kim Hicks, 11 years old in 1970: 'There were these wonderful crowds on the [suspension] bridge and then... slowly round the bend in the river appeared this... rusted old hulk, and you looked at this and you thought, what's all the fuss about?... as she came under the bridge my mum opened the box and we started to drop the rose petals on her... it was really lovely.'

### **1970 FACT FILE:**

- Fashion – Maxi dresses are the big fashion story;
- Food – Prawn cocktail and tuna bake are the dishes de jour; Favourite sweets were love hearts, space dusts, Barratt's shrimps and golf ball bubble gum; Milk costs the equivalent of 5p a pint and beer 10.7p a pint;
- The media – 'The Goodies' and 'Monty Python's Flying Circus' split audiences; Children's favourites include 'The Clangers', 'Tom and Jerry' and 'Top of the Pops'; BBC launches the Nine O'clock News and BBC Radio 4 becomes a wholly speech network; Editor of 'The Sun' Larry Lamb introduces its first topless 'Page 3' pin-up on November 17 (20-year-old German Stephanie Rahn);
- Films – 'On Her Majesty's Service', 'Catch 22' and Walt Disney's 'Aristocats';
- Books – Publication of Germaine Greer's 'The Female Eunuch';
- Music – Hits aptly include The Beatles 'Let It Be' and the Jackson Five's 'I Want You Back', with Mungo Jerry taking pole position on July 19 with 'In The Summertime'; Simon and Garfunkel release their final album 'Bridge Over Troubled Water' and The Beatles break up. Michael Eavis holds the first Glastonbury Festival, headlined by T-Rex; 600,000 people attend the Isle of Wight Festival – the largest rock gathering of all time;
- Engineering – Concorde is still in development, with the first test flight in 1969; the first Pan Am Boeing 747 jet lands in Heathrow heralding a new era in global travel; Apollo 13 is launched on a mission to the moon; the Aswan High Dam in Egypt is completed;
- Births – Matt Damon; Debbie Gibson; Queen Latifah and Naomi Campbell;
- Deaths – Jimi Hendrix dies of barbiturate overdose in London; Philosopher Bertrand Russell aged 98;
- Politics – Prime Ministers are Harold Wilson (to June) and Edward Heath; Richard Nixon is the US President; 18-year-olds can vote for the first time in UK elections;
- Popular toys – Barbie, Sindy and Action Man;
- Vehicles – the Ford Cortina Mark iii is Britain's biggest seller and Ariel introduces a three-wheeled motorbike;
- Money – the last year before decimalisation; the average house in Britain costs £5,000; British Petroleum (BP) discovers North Sea oil;
- World affairs – April 29 the USA invades Cambodia to suppress the Viet Cong; May 9 sees huge demonstrations against the Vietnam War; Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons is adopted by 43 signatory nations;
- Other 1970 phenomena – the first New York marathon, the stylophone, x-ray specs and Farah Fawcett Shampoo.