

Press release: 26 July 2005

How to Build a Boat – a new exhibition at the revitalised Boat Museum, Ellesmere Port – opened by Ken Dodd

A new gallery and an interactive exhibition at The Boat Museum, Ellesmere Port, were unveiled today (Tuesday 26 July) by Liverpool-born comedy legend, Ken Dodd. Andrew Miller, MP for Ellesmere Port and Neston, also attended the launch. The new exhibition hall and other new facilities, open to the public for the first time, are part of an ambitious £1.6million programme to revitalise the museum.

The exhibition, *'How to Build a Boat'*, explores the building of wooden and metal narrowboats that worked on canals in their heyday, looking back to much earlier boats, such as the 2000-year-old log boat and the coracle.

The Boat Museum, situated in the 200-year old historic dock complex on the south bank of the River Mersey, close to the Port of Liverpool, has the largest collection of historic inland waterway craft in Britain including narrowboats, canal barges, river barges, canal and river tugs, icebreakers and a coaster. It is one of the three leading waterway museums managed by the charity The Waterways Trust.

'How to Build a Boat' is housed in a new gallery on the ground floor of the Island Warehouse, previously used as storage and offices. Dating back to 1871, the Island Warehouse is the largest building on the seven-acre site and has been refurbished so that it can be utilised fully, doubling the exhibition space. A new roof protects the Grade II listed building and a new floating pontoon bridge takes visitors past the historic boats to the main exhibition area. A new lift has been installed to provide easy access between the two floors.

An important part of the scheme is to enhance the interpretation of the site and collections so that the history of the canals can be brought to life in a stimulating and lively way for everyone – families, school parties, waterway enthusiasts and the general public.

'How to Build a Boat', has an emphasis on sound, computer-based exhibits and interactive displays. Visitors will be able to examine the construction of early boats, such as a coracle and a 2000-year old log boat and other boat shapes, through the heyday of the canals in the 1800s up to the present day. Materials, tools, fastenings, painting and fitting out of boats will all be displayed.

The additional space will enable many more objects to be brought out of store so that they can be seen. Plans and photographs of people, boats and boatyards will be taken from the archives to be used as part of the exhibition. One of the highlights for visitors will be a specially created computer-generated exhibit in which a flat plan is transformed into a living vessel, demonstrating in seconds what would have taken months for the boat

builders of the 18th and 19th centuries to see. The largest exhibit is the ice breaker 'Wappenshall' which worked the Shropshire Canal system near Telford.

The story of those who lived and worked on the canals comes alive on the upper floor of the exhibition area with more interactive displays and recordings of surviving members of old canal families. Canal crafts including fender making, leather working, painting and rope making are demonstrated in a specially designated area.

Funding for the £1.6 million refurbishment has come from the Heritage Lottery Fund, which provided a grant of £901,000, and has also been part financed through the European Commission's European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), which is funding supported through Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council's Economic Development Zone, providing £342,654. The Northwest Regional Development Agency (NWDA) has provided £200,000. Other funding partners include local Landfill Operator, Waste Recycling Group Ltd., which has awarded landfill tax monies of £45,000 for the project with an additional £22,275 for the pontoon bridge works, both grants administered by WREN.

Ken Dodd said: "I am very pleased to open the new gallery and exhibition at The Boat Museum. Ellesmere Port has a special place in my heart as I made my first appearance on stage here. Kids and their parents are going to love this new exhibition. There are lots of games, interactives and things you can touch so you really get a chance to find out about canals, boats and the people who worked and lived on them. The Museum has the largest collection of canal boats in the country. You can take a trip on one or play with the model boats and there are lots of events and activities during the summer, so why not come and take a look?"

Andrew Miller, MP for Ellesmere Port and Neston, said: "We're here today to celebrate a bright new future for The Boat Museum. The investment in the site, which has been made possible by the generosity of the Heritage Lottery Fund, ERDF, NWDA and WREN, will bring in new visitors to The Boat Museum and to the area. But the Museum is more than a tourist attraction; it is an outstanding resource for education and holds a major part of the national inland waterways collection. I am working with The Waterways Trust, fellow MPs and government to bring in direct funding for the conservation of this important collection."

Roger Hanbury, Chief Executive of The Waterways Trust said: "This is a special moment in the history of The Boat Museum which has so much to offer children and adults alike. With the help of generous grants we are investing £1.6million and transforming everything the Museum offers, so whether you're interested in learning or having a good day out, a visit to The Boat Museum will be a more enjoyable experience."

Notes to editors:

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The Waterways Trust is a national charity working in partnerships with others to promote greater public enjoyment of the UK's waterways. We raise funds for waterway regeneration, conservation, recreation, community, arts, education, and access and activity projects. Our three museums at Gloucester, Ellesmere Port and Stoke Bruerne house a nationally important Designated collection. Together with the Waterways Archive, they tell the story of the profound influence on the waterways on social, technological, economic and environmental development in the UK over three centuries.

www.thewaterwaystrust.org.uk

The Boat Museum, Telephone 0151 355 5017

South Pier Road, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire, CH65 4FW. (Junction 9, M53)

www.boatmuseum.org.uk

Opening hours

Summer Season April to October

open every day from 10am to 5pm

Winter Season November to March

(Closed Thursday and Friday) open 11am to 4pm

Admission Charges 2005/06

Adult £6.45

Child £4.75

Concession (OAP, Student) £5.25

Family ticket £19.00 (2 adults and 3 children)

OAP Family Ticket £17.75 (2 OAP's and up to 3 children)

Under 5's free if accompanied by a parent or guardian