

PRESS RELEASE

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NATIONAL HERITAGE MEMORIAL FUND AWARDS MAJOR GRANT TO SAVE RARE STEAMBOAT SAVED FOR THE UK

The Canal & River Trust charity has received a grant of £234,000 from the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) to rescue and preserve a rare Clyde puffer boat, at the Trust's National Waterways Museum in Ellesmere Port.

The 66 ft canal boat, whose classification as a 'puffer' derives from the puffing sound made by her steam engine, was built in Glasgow in 1902. She has been moored in one of the museum's basins for more than 40 years. Named Basuto, the narrowboat is on the National Historic Ships Fleet Register, of similar importance to the Cutty Sark, HMS Victory and SS Great Britain. The Trust has secured the grant to ensure that important maintenance is undertaken on the boat that will make the boat watertight and secure it for future generations.

The £254,000 project involves carefully craning the boat out of the water onto the museum slipway and her new, permanent home, resting on a metal support frame. The exterior will be carefully cleaned, before the frame, deck, wheelhouse and hold covers are repaired and re-painted to make her watertight against the weather, as part of a long-term conservation plan.

Steve Bagley, manager of the Trust's National Collections, said: "We are very grateful to National Heritage Memorial Fund for making this life-saving grant, which will preserve this important boat for the nation.

"Basuto is the oldest known surviving inland 'puffer' and has had a fascinating life, starting out on the Forth & Clyde Canal carrying pig iron, then moving to Ireland, back to Scotland, down to Liverpool, over to Widnes, then Manchester Docks, before travelling to Ellesmere Port in 1981.

Canal & River Trust

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Canal & River Trust is a charitable company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales with company number 7807276 and registered charity number 1146792, registered office address: National Waterways Museum, Ellesmere Port.

“Originally built to ensure canal transport could compete with railways, Basuto has been modified several times, served through two world wars and worked as a valued cargo vessel on many of Britain and Ireland’s larger inland waterways for nearly 80 years. She takes her name from Basutoland in Lesotho, a landlocked country in South Africa, which was once part of the British Empire. She is unique and her personal historical journey gives us a valuable window into our nation’s history – a story which we will be telling the public as part of new interpretation displays to accompany her rescue.”

The National Heritage Memorial Fund was set up in 1980 and supports the acquisition, preservation and maintenance of the UK’s most outstanding heritage.

Simon Thurley, Chair of the National Heritage Memorial Fund said: “As the oldest known surviving inland ‘puffer’, Basuto’s story takes us on a fascinating 80-year journey on the UK’s waterways. We are delighted that it will find a new home on a slipway at the National Waterways Museum.

“The National Heritage Memorial Fund exists to save the UK’s most outstanding heritage and make it publicly accessible, in memory of those who have given their lives for the UK. We are delighted to count Basuto as part of the growing and timeless collection of UK heritage that belongs to all of us.”

The plan is to lift Basuto out of the water in late spring and complete the repairs, preservation and conservation works by the end of this year, in time for the boat to be the centrepiece of celebrations to mark the museum’s 50th anniversary in 2026.

Known locally as the Boat Museum, the National Waterways Museum site is located at the junction of the Manchester Ship Canal and the Shropshire Union Canal. It displays a fascinating collection of historic boats, waterways artifacts and steam-driven machinery, as well as telling the story of Britain’s canals.

For more information about visiting the museum, check out the website <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/places-to-visit/national-waterways-museum>.

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Canal & River Trust

Notes to Editors

The Canal & River Trust cares for and brings to life 2,000 miles of canals and rivers across England & Wales. We believe waterways have the power to make a difference to people’s lives and that spending time by water can make us all healthier and happier. By bringing

communities together to make a difference to their local waterway, we are creating places and spaces that can be used and enjoyed by everyone, every day.

www.canalrivertrust.org.uk @CanalRiverTrust

About the National Heritage Memorial Fund

The National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) was set up in 1980 to save the most outstanding parts of our heritage, to create a public collection as a memorial to those who have given their lives for the UK. NHMF receives annual grant-in-aid of £5million from the UK government to help save some of our most-loved treasures such as paintings, natural heritage, maritime and industrial vessels, and historic houses, from being lost forever. Any funds remaining from NHMF's annual allocation at the end of the financial year remain available to NHMF to award grants to exceptional heritage treasures such as the Portrait of Mai (Omai), The Artist Rooms, Titian's Diana and Acteon, the Honresfield Library, Tyntesfield Estate and Wentworth Woodhouse.

www.nhmf.org.uk

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