‘Ours is the epic story of the Royal Navy, its impact on Britain and the world from its origins in 625 AD to the present day.’

MASTER NARRATIVE OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE ROYAL NAVY

Ours is the story of the Royal Navy in the setting of the North East of England; we explore the everyday experiences of sailors and the varying relationships which were formed between the Royal Navy and the coastal communities impacted by its presence, and the worldwide implications of the activities that took place in the North Sea.

Our story has four overlapping themes: People, Power, Purpose and Progress.

People
We explore the changing lives of sailors; the work they undertook, how they trained, what they ate and drank, sleeping and washing arrangements and how they spent their free time. We look at the public perception of Royal Navy sailors; as celebrated heroes and as a highly trained professional; we examine the contributions of the territories which have maintained, repaired, and later restored, Royal Navy ships, from the Indian builders of HMS Trincomalee to the conservators of today, and explore the other relationships between the Navy and the North East communities on land, coast and sea.

Power
We describe the Royal Navy’s role at the height of the British Empire, in both its glory and its exploitation, when ships such as HMS Trincomalee were built in India and thousands of miles were traveled around the world to maintain British interests. We also look at power in a literal sense; the complex rigging of wooden sailing vessels, the coal-fuelled steam ships, marine engines and the advanced technologies of the present day.

Purpose
We examine the role of the Royal Navy with particular focus on the North East of England and the North Sea. From patrolling and mapping to fighting, hunting, surface and rescue, we pay tribute to the crucial activities and contributions of supply vessels like those of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary and Royal Navy ships like those of the Coastal Forces.

Progress
We examine the massive advances of communications, navigation and ship and weapons designs and how the Admiralty and Royal Navy shipbuilders and suppliers responded to the demands of both war and peace. We also reflect why and how the Navy could be slow to modify and move forward. We explore the advances made in the preservation of historic naval vessels and the increasing value placed upon such activities as the National Museum of the Royal Navy’s fleet of historic ships grows in size and popularity.

National Museum of the Royal Navy, Hartlepool - Site Narrative

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**NARRATIVE STRANDS**

These narrative strands, all of which have links to the National Museum of the Royal Navy’s Master Narrative Themes, outline in more detail the stories we tell; we will bring them to life through our historic vessels, museum galleries, collections, special exhibitions, learning programmes and activities, events, publications and partnerships.

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techniques, as well as new developments in conservation.

HMS Broke being repaired on Tyneside following the Battle of Jutland, 1916.

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Reserve fleet maintenance, Hartlepool, 1950s. Reproduced with the Permission of Hartlepool Borough Council

Passenger liner Empress of Canada ready for launch at the Walker Naval Yard, Newcastle upon Tyne, 10 May 1960.

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West Hartlepool Docks hosting the Royal Navy’s reserve ‘mothball fleet’, 1950s. Reproduced with the Permission of Hartlepool Borough Council
Although the essence of their role has always remained the operation and maintenance of their vessels, the lives of Royal Navy crews have changed beyond recognition. Recruitment and training methods are increasingly more sophisticated, and women in the Royal Navy are playing a larger role than ever before. Advances in technology and a greater emphasis on comfort, health and wellbeing have made the modern sailor’s life a great deal less physically demanding and overcrowded.

There is no longer a requirement for preserved food, with fresh food supplies more readily available; the hygiene and diet for those on board ship are as good as those who live on land and uniforms have become more practically suited to the tasks they undertake.
Engine-powered vessels needed fuel, while sail power only needed the wind and a skilled crew; coal from the Northeast was transported by collier ships to the south of England to power the Royal Navy and later, oil tankers built in Hartlepool travelled the world’s seas to service Royal Navy ships’ requirements.

Hartlepool was also the home of several important manufacturers of marine engines used in Royal Navy ships and the surviving archives of designs and drawings uniquely illustrate the feats of engineering that these, now largely forgotten, companies were achieving.
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During the Second World War, Coastal Forces developed into an important branch of the Service and made a vital contribution to the naval successes of the conflict, providing defence and rescue services and shore side support, as well as keeping supply routes flowing around the UK’s coastline.

SUPPLY, DEFENCE AND RESCUE

The Royal Navy always needed auxiliary vessels to support its fighting ships and the supply of fuel became essential when vessels no longer relied upon sail power alone. Since 1905, the civilian-manned Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) has supported the Royal Navy to maintain operations around the world by supplying fuel, ammunition and supplies, and by transporting Army and Royal Marine personnel.

The bombardment of Hartlepool in 1914 was one occasion which demonstrated the need for heightened coastal defence as conflicts at sea came ever closer to the people of Britain.

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