



Robin, loaded on her pontoon heads down the Waveney and through Lowestoft road bridge, above, through the harbours mouth, bottom of page, and onto sea, right. Aerials photographs by Mike Page



# Robin steams on, aged 120

*The world's oldest steamship has a new lease of life thanks to the skills and expertise of craftsmen at an East Anglian firm. Jo Malone reports.*

**TWELVE MONTHS** OF hard work paid off for the team of Harbour Marine Services of Suffolk when the historic SS Robin was safely waved off from Lowestoft to London after extensive conservation work.

One of only three ships in London on the Core Collection of the National Historic Ships Register, the 1890-built ship now sits permanently in a floating pontoon. She is set to become a floating museum where people

will be able to discover more about her amazing history as a cargo steamship, and the interlinked stories of London's industrialisation, shipbuilding, seafaring, trade, energy and migration.

When the SS Robin arrived in Suffolk she was in a very fragile state and certainly an exciting project for the HMS craftsmen, who specialise in restoring historic vessels at their Southwold Harbour site. Due to her large size she worked on her in Lowestoft, using traditional skills and techniques to restore everything from the bridge and poop decks, lifeboats, masts and rigging, hatch covers and many other associated tasks.

It was a mammoth undertaking with HMS managing director John Buckley the technical supervisor for the project, which involved organising and co-ordinating additional specialists from around the region to work alongside the HMS team.

His local knowledge in the field meant he could call in the right teams to carry out works such as blasting, painting, steel works and fabrication and ship joinery.

The most ambitious, and nail-

biting, part of the restoration involved her crane lift from the slipway to the bespoke floating pontoon.

This floating pontoon - approximately 160ft long by 70 ft wide - was constructed in Poland and pulled by tug to Lowestoft. Two of the biggest cranes in Britain were used for the lift, which saw a clearance of just 5mm either side. Not a ship built for lifting in or out of the water, it was impossible to say for sure if the 143ft long steamboat would survive the strain of the lift. But, with a team of more than 40 people on site, it all went perfectly and she sustained no damage whatsoever.

That meant huge sighs of relief for the HMS shipwrights, who had spent painstaking hours stripping her down, repairing, conserving, replacing and repainting in her original colours as part of the £1.9million programme of conservation works, funded by Crossrail.

**“The most ambitious, and nail-biting, part of the restoration involved her crane lift...”**

John Buckley was delighted with his team. “I am very proud of the way in which our staff rose to the challenge of this ambitious project and in particular Mark Brett whom was the senior shipwright throughout the project,” he said.

“HMS Ltd has been proud to be associated with this unique restoration project of this nationally historic vessel,” he added.

The team's work has been highly praised too. Nishani Kampfer, managing director and co-founder of the SS Robin Trust said →





Robin, as she was a century ago.

working with John and his team had been an absolute pleasure.

"There were many difficult challenges on the conservation of SS Robin - delivering a scheme and solution that has never been done before - each time HMS managed to surpass

our expectations - with their commitment to excellent workmanship and their sensitivity towards the historic fabric of the vessel.

"We are absolutely delighted with the results, as the trust's conservation advisors and experts. The whole team should be extremely proud of their contribution in saving this historic vessel for the nation."

It was a proud moment when a restored SS Robin set off for the

Port of Tilbury, London's principal trading port, which is giving her a temporary home while options for her future base in London are evaluated. It's hoped she will open as a floating museum before the London Olympics in 2012.

SS Robin is a traditional raised quarterdeck coastal cargo steamer, built in east London. Now the only complete example in the world, her working life would have seen her always within sight of land ferrying goods in the waters around Britain and the continent.

She carried cargoes of grain, coal, scrap steel, pit props, railway steel, herring barrels, china clay and granite blocks for the Caledonian Canal. In the First World War she carried iron slabs for the French government, escorted by two destroyers. ▲

#### Information

Find out more at: [www.ssrobin.org](http://www.ssrobin.org)

Thanks to the team at Harbour Marine Services, Blackshore, Southwold Harbour, [www.southwoldharbour.co.uk](http://www.southwoldharbour.co.uk)

## Up for the world race, skipper?

### Sir Robin looks for ten top professionals for next year's Clipper

**SAILING LEGEND** Sir Robin Knox-Johnston has launched his latest search for ten exceptional skippers to lead teams in the next Clipper Round the World Yacht Race. And he appeals to east coasters, knowing the skills of many of you out there.

Clipper 11-12 will start from the UK in August next year and on board the fleet of stripped down 68-foot ocean racing yachts will be teams of novice crews representing all walks of life. A number will be from East Anglia.

The only professional sailor on board, the skipper has the challenge of turning such a diverse mix of people into a finely-honed racing team and it's one that professionals understand can deliver valuable benefits to their CV.

Sir Robin says: "Tackling this unique challenge, with its roaring gales and towering seas, as well as the frustrations of tricky calm spells, is no mean feat. The skippers we are looking for need to be up to the challenge of competitively racing our 68-foot yachts around the world with a non-professional crew onboard.

"The successful individuals must have the ability to draw the line between competitiveness and safety, whilst also motivating a sometimes exhausted crew into an enthusiastic and committed team.

"Leading a team of novice sailors in a race around the world is one of the hardest and most challenging jobs that any skipper could ever undertake and not everybody is up to this challenge."

He paid tribute to past skippers - including Matt Pike of Ipswich who skippered Edinburgh in the event which finished in July (see Anglia Afloat September issue).

Successful candidates will skipper one of the Dubois designed Clipper 68s and must also have an understanding of the commercial and media demands of this high-profile global event which can help launch a skipper's career.

Interested skippers need to have the correct level of qualifications, including an MCA approved Ocean Yachtmaster. They need to be excellent sailors who put seamanship and safety first, have a proven track record in sail training and can demonstrate that they are strong team leaders. ▲

#### Information

If you think you are up for the challenge contact Sir Robin by email on [sirrobinknoxjohnston@clipper-ventures.com](mailto:sirrobinknoxjohnston@clipper-ventures.com) to request an application form.

For information on how you can enter as a novice, log on to [www.clipperroundtheworld.com](http://www.clipperroundtheworld.com)

