

500th voyage for SS Shieldhall as Charity celebrates

The Solent Steam Packet Limited, the charity operating Southampton's heritage steamship SS Shieldhall, are celebrating as the vessel recently embarked upon her 500th voyage since charitable status began in 1988.

Originally constructed in 1955 as a vessel to carry treated sludge down the River Clyde to the dumping grounds for the Glasgow Corporation, Shieldhall was sold to Southern Water in 1977 to perform a similar role out of Southampton. Her role was discontinued due to rising costs and Shieldhall was due to be sold for scrap. However, a group of enterprising individuals saw her heritage value, forming the charity and purchasing her for her scrap price of £20k. Amongst the 500 sailings since have been been trips to Dordrecht in Holland and to her home port of Glasgow for Shieldhall's 50th birthday celebrations in 2005. Although currently limited to sailing in Solent waters (with passengers) it is hoped to extend the list of cruise destinations in future years.

Shieldhall's 500th sailing saw her set sail at 10am on Sat 1 July for an all day Solent cruise, giving passengers the opportunity to enjoy the spectacle of what turned out to be a record breaking Round the Island Yacht Race. As with all Shieldhall cruises, passengers were able to see the impressive Shieldhall engine room with its original steam engines at work, and the Bridge, with its traditional instruments and gleaming brasswork. Warm weather also meant the bar and saloon were busy with a steady stream of visitors for Shieldhall's renowned real ale, bacon butties and ice cream!

Shieldhall Chief Engineer Graham Mackenzie was delighted at reaching the 500th voyage milestone. 'It is a credit to our loyal band of volunteers that Shieldhall is 500 voyages strong, with the promise of many more to come. We are all united in our love of steam and keeping the tradition of steamships in Southampton going strong. The first steam packet companies operated out of Southampton in the 1820s and nearly 200 years later passengers can still get to appreciate this wonderful mode of travel. Shieldhall is a living time capsule, the skills of our volunteers fast belonging to a forgotten age. However, thanks to a recent HLF grant we have been able to secure her future for many years to come, and are reaching out to new audiences who have never set foot on board a steamship. The smell of the steam, the distinctive sound of the Shieldhall whistle, the opportunity to feel the heat of the Boiler Room - these are experiences that are never forgotten by our passengers.'

Today Shieldhall is the largest operational, passenger-cargo steam ship in Britain. A member of the National Historic Fleet she serves as a sea going tribute to Britain's maritime heritage. Shieldhall is based in and sails from Southampton Docks (except for a few days in

September in Poole where she is moored for the Bournemouth Air Festival). Full details of the 2017 cruise programme and berthing information can be found at www.ss-shieldhall.co.uk

Tickets for cruises can be purchased online at www.ss-shieldhall.co.uk or by calling the Ticket Manager on 0844 357 2329 (*calls cost 7p per minute from landline, calls from mobiles may vary*).

Shieldhall's late August and September Schedule:

BH Mon 28 August – One-Way Trip to Poole from Southampton – 10am – 4pm

Fri 1 September – Bournemouth Air Festival Sailing from Poole Quay – 10am – 7pm

Sat 2 September – Bournemouth Air Festival Sailing from Poole Quay – 10am – 7pm

Sun 3 September - Bournemouth Air Festival Sailing and Merchant Navy Day Service from Poole Quay – 10am – 7pm

Mon 4 September – One-Way Trip to Southampton from Poole – 10am – 4pm

Sat 9 September – Heritage Open Day Trip – 4pm – 6pm

Sun 10 September - Heritage Open Day Trip – 4pm – 6pm

Sat 16 September – Southampton Boat Show Cruise – 3pm – 6pm

Sun 17 September – Final season cruise, Head to the Solent and see 3 cruise ships depart – 3pm – 6pm

It is planned to have an outline of Shieldhall's 2018 sailing programme available by mid-September 2017.