MINISTER FOR CULTURE IN YORK TO SEE ORNATE RUDDER FROM 400 YEAR OLD SHIPWRECK

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Ed Vaizey, the Minister for Culture, will visit York today to see a unique and ornately carved ship’s rudder, which is being restored in the city after being rescued from one of the UK’s most important protected wreck sites.

The rudder, which is eight point two metres long and includes a man’s carved face, was raised from the “Swash Channel Wreck” near Poole. York Archaeological Trust is undertaking the conservation, while its recovery and analysis has been funded by English Heritage to the tune of over £200,000.

Ed Vaizey said, “The preservation and conservation of our unique heritage doesn’t just apply to those sites and artefacts on land but also the heritage landscape that lies under the sea. It’s fascinating to see first-hand the expert work being done by the York Archaeological Trust to restore and conserve the Swash Channel Wreck so it can be returned to Poole Museum.”

Mark Dunkley, Maritime Designation Adviser at English Heritage, said: “We are very pleased the Minister has found time in his busy schedule to see this extremely important find recovered by Bournemouth University. The Swash Channel Wreck is the most significant protected wreck site since the Mary Rose, and nothing like this large and beautifully carved rudder has ever been found in the UK. It is testament to York’s position as a centre of excellence in archaeology that the wreck has been transported here for the highly skilled conservation work to be done here by the York Archaeological Trust.”
Ian Panter, principal conservator at York Archaeological Trust said, “We have one of the few conservation laboratories with specialist equipment and expertise to deal with underwater finds. It is rare to find such a nationally important collection that is so well preserved such as the Swash Channel Wreck finds. We look forward to continuing the work with the University of Bournemouth and English Heritage, helping to piece together the story behind this vessel and preserve such wonderful examples of craftsmanship from the 1600s.”

Bournemouth University has been investigating the site for a number of years and it is now believed to be the remains of a large Dutch or German armed cargo ship from the 1600s. As well as the rudder, maritime archaeologists have also found cannons, barrels, pottery and shoes. It sank sometime after 1630 but no historical record of this has yet been found.

Dave Parham, Senior lecturer in Maritime Archaeology at Bournemouth University said, “Bournemouth University students and staff have been working on this site since 2006, excavation began in 2007. The raising of the rudder with its Baroque carved head represents the culmination of eight years of work. I am very proud of our team for this fantastic achievement.

English Heritage has provided £450,000 to rescue the wreck and analyse the objects recovered from the sea before they are put on public display. The wreck was discovered in 2004, because it was vulnerable to seabed erosion it was added to English Heritage “Heritage at Risk” Register in 2009, before being successfully removed in 2010. There are currently 47 protected wreck sites in England’s territorial waters, and at present 4 remain so fragile that they are listed on the Heritage at Risk Register. This project demonstrates how highlighting vulnerable wreck sites through the Register can ensure that their condition is monitored, and their secrets unlocked before they are lost.

The rudder will be returned to Poole Museum when its restoration is complete.

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English Heritage is the Government’s statutory advisor on the historic environment,
advising on how best to conserve England’s heritage for the benefit of everyone.

www.english-heritage.org.uk

The Swash Channel is a historic wreck site designated under the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973. Further detail is available from the National Heritage List for England: