



## ***Saved for the Nation: HMS Belfast celebrates 50 years since its arrival on the River Thames***

- ***14 October will mark 50 years since HMS Belfast arrived on the Thames, having been saved from becoming scrap metal***
- ***Newly digitised footage has been released by Imperial War Museums which shows the ship being towed along the River Thames from Portsmouth in 1971***
- ***HMS Belfast will also be celebrating 50 years since opening to the public as a London attraction on 21 October and boasts refreshed displays, crew member stories and new multi-sensory and interactive experiences since reopening this summer***

In October 1971, crowds lined the banks of the Thames to see [HMS Belfast](#) arrive at its new home in the Pool of London. Weighing in at over 11,000 tons and armed with twelve 6-inch guns, it was the last example of the big gun warships that protected and empowered Britain for over a century. Yet it was very nearly destined for the scrap heap. This October will mark 50 years since HMS Belfast was saved from this humiliating fate and newly digitised footage has been released by the Imperial War Museums showing this magnificent veteran of war being towed along the River Thames to begin its new life as a museum ship.

Launched in 1938, HMS Belfast saw plenty of action during its years of service including enduring the ravages of the Arctic Convoys, leading the shore bombardment on D-Day and being deployed to the frontline of the Korean War. Now an icon of the London cityscape and with a newly refreshed onboard offering, HMS Belfast has occupied a prime position in the Thames for half a century, but it very nearly faced a different sort of retirement when it was earmarked for the scrap heap in 1971. It was thanks to the ship's former Captain, Rear Admiral Sir Morgan Morgan-Giles MP, who formed the HMS Belfast Trust, that the ship was saved through the launch of 'Operation Seahorse' which successfully convinced the British government to turn *Belfast* over to the Trust. The necessary preparations were then made for *Belfast* to leave Portsmouth, the spiritual home of the Royal Navy, and take one final voyage to its permanent home between Tower Bridge and London Bridge.

Ron Yardley, who served on HMS Belfast during the Korean War as a Telegraphist, recalled the ship arriving in London saying, "I saw the *Belfast* when she arrived home again to the Pool of London and I thought, at that time, a very big part of my life had come back again." Since then, HMS Belfast has also played a starring role in some iconic cultural moments over the last few decades including featuring in TV shows such as *Outnumbered*, *The Crown* and *Killing Eve* and staged performances from Spandau Ballet, Eminem and Depeche Mode, to name a few.

As well as film footage, the IWM collection includes documents from the early establishment of the HMS Belfast Trust, showing the alterations to the geography of the Thames that were considered in order to add *Belfast* to the city's skyline. The collection also includes minutes from a meeting of the Trust which note that the clearance between the water and the walkways of Tower Bridge was only fifteen feet larger than *Belfast's* own masthead meaning it would be a tight squeeze for the magnificent warship. IWM also holds an official letter from the Secretary of State to the HMS Belfast Trust permitting the ship to fly the white ensign which made *Belfast* the only ship outside the Royal Navy to be allowed to fly one at this time. Footage of the First Sea Lord handing the flag to Captain Morgan-Giles can be viewed [here](#).

Nigel Steel, curator at IWM and Head of Content at HMS Belfast, said "As the largest item in the IWM collection, HMS Belfast was, and remains, a complex living machine. The operation of the ship involved multiple, intricately balanced steps that combined technical, electronic and mechanical processes and all were undertaken by the thousands of men who lived on board during the years of operational service. For half a

*century, Belfast has been interpreted and presented to bring its ship's company to life, restoring them individually and collectively, to the places where they fought, worked and lived. The new displays unveiled in summer 2021 are the latest iteration of this, ensuring that the spirit of HMS Belfast will live on for generations. It was with immense foresight that Captain Morgan-Giles and the HMS Belfast Trust set about saving the ship for the public to enjoy and we at IWM are dedicated to safeguarding this great survivor, and the stories of all those who served onboard, for many years to come."*

**Two 20-second clips of the newly digitised footage of HMS *Belfast* arriving in London can be [downloaded here](#), and a selection of hi res images are [available here](#). More is available via our film licencing team [filmcommercial@iwm.org.uk](mailto:filmcommercial@iwm.org.uk)**

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### **HMS Belfast**

HMS Belfast is the most significant surviving Second World War Royal Navy warship, with a history that extends to the Arctic Convoys, D-Day, the Cold War, Korea and beyond. Moored on the River Thames between London Bridge and Tower Bridge, HMS Belfast tells the story of life on board and explores how war affects and impacts on the morale, resilience and determination of a ship's company. We take visitors on a journey through the ship's nine decks and show them what life was like for the 950 strong crew, through the real-life stories of the men who served onboard.

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