

Press Release

19 July 2021

The power of the arts in Medway:

A new exhibition that has kept sight impaired, blind, deaf or hard of hearing artists connected through the pandemic.

Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust, in partnership with the Mess Room, Kent Association for the Blind, Peer Arts and Deaf Peer Arts, are pleased to announce the opening new, temporary exhibition at The Historic Dockyard Chatham.

Hidden Heroines: by the Mess Room and Friends, is an exhibition of artworks by local people who are sight impaired, blind, deaf or hard of hearing in response to The Historic Dockyard Chatham's 'Hidden Heroines: the untold stories of women of the Dockyard' exhibition. The exhibition will be on display in No.1 Smithery, from Wednesday, July 21 until Tuesday, August 31 2021.

Led by local artists Wendy Daws and Christopher Sacre, co-founders of the MESS ROOM, a community arts studio based at Sun Pier House, Chatham, artists from the Kent Association for the Blind, Peer Arts and Deaf Peer Arts were invited to create work in response to the newly opened exhibition 'Hidden Heroines: the untold stories of the women of the Dockyard' at The Historic Dockyard Chatham.

COVID-19 pandemic restrictions meant the art group were unable to meet for over a year. This project was developed to give local artists the opportunity to reconnect with each other and their local history. Every artist rose to the challenge of 'art homework' and as a result have created an incredible exhibition.

Katherine Barr, Head of Client Services, Kent Association for the Blind, said: *"After the difficulties of COVID-19, this fascinating project was a wonderful way to bring Kent Association for the Blind's Medway Art group back together. The exhibition is an amazing*

celebration of their work and a great opportunity for local people to discover what people with sight impairments can achieve.”

Alexandra Curson, Curator, Hidden Heroines: the untold stories of the women of the Dockyard, Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust, said: *“COVID-19 has thrown up many challenges for people. For those sight impaired, blind, deaf or hard of hearing the pandemic restrictions had additional challenges. The Royal National Institute for the Blind reported higher rates of isolation and subsequent depression among sight-impaired people in normal times. However, over the last year, for people that need to touch objects and surfaces to make their way around or rely on British Sign language or lip reading, life suddenly became much tougher. Through working in partnership with the Mess Room, we have reconnected local artists and given them a creative output during what has been an incredibly challenging time. The resulting exhibition is wonderful and has allowed us to interpret our new exhibition in new ways, to new audiences.”*

Helen King, artist, said: *“Before my sight loss I went to art college and worked with children making art displays. I loved to paint. When my vision was damaged, I thought that life had ended. The art group inspired me to try and paint again, and that world opened for me again. The group is so encouraging and friendly. We understand each other’s difficulties support each other’s triumphs. And it’s wonderful to know that we can still produce beautiful and interesting things. This painting of Poppies, entitled Light and Hope through Darkness, is the first painting I did after my stroke I had last year.”*

Norma Benham, Member of Peer Arts, said: *“I have been looking at the graffiti scratched into Chatham Dockyard bricks for many years. This has evolved into this work and a record of the words and messages from those that have walked, lived and worked here before me. It occurred to me how many factories and industries would have benefitted by the Dockyard using their machinery. I have portrayed elements of this as graffiti on my painted bricks. I love the patterns and shapes created by electrical boxes, these ones can be found near the Ropery Office and are some of my favourites. The pictures depict words and letters that appear on all aspects of the yard, buildings, ships and very fabric of one of my favourite places to spend my time in – the Chatham Dockyard.”*

New Access Tours at The Historic Dockyard Chatham

Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust aims to ensure there is a legacy for this project by using the new exhibition to launch an upcoming programming of audio described and British Sign Language (BSL) tours. The Trust is committed to working with Kent Association for the Blind

to provide awareness training to the museum, helping its staff to provide a excellent experience for visually impaired visitors.

British Sign Language Tours:

- Saturday, August 14 (10.30am – 12.30pm)
- Saturday, October 9 (10.30am – 12.30pm) – family friendly
- Saturday, March 12 (10.30am – 12.30pm)

Audio Described Tours:

- Friday, August 13 (10.30 am – 12.30pm) – Hidden Heroines: the untold stories of the women of the Dockyard
- Saturday, October 16 (10.30am – 12.30pm)

The MESS ROOM will also be hosting family art workshops at The Historic Dockyard Chatham on Thursday, August 5th and Saturday, August 21st.

For more information see thedockyard.co.uk

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MORE PRESS INFORMATION

Please contact Lynnette Crisp on 07816 296387 or email lcrisp@chdt.org.uk for further information

Notes to Editors

About Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust

The Historic Dockyard Chatham has over 100 buildings and structures, including 47 Scheduled Ancient Monuments. The site is in the stewardship of the independent charity, Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust (No. 292101).

The Trust's dual objectives of education and preservation are achieved by a strategy of preservation through reuse. Some of the buildings are open to visitors; others are occupied by residential tenants, businesses, and faculties of the University of Kent.

As a fully accredited museum, the Trust collects, preserves, researches and exhibits objects and materials connected with the history of the dockyard and its people. It studies the

development of Royal Navy warship design, construction and the use of the River Medway by the Royal Navy. The Historic Dockyard Chatham presents unrivalled status as the most complete and best-preserved dockyard of the Age of Sail anywhere in the world. It immerses audiences in a mighty feat of preservation, innovation education and heritage. It offers access to the ships that shaped the world, from a Victorian antislavery sailing ship, to a Second World War Destroyer and a Cold War submarine as well as the stories of the people who made them. From historic buildings, including the Commissioner's House and officers' quarters to the remarkable Victorian ropery, where the rigging for HMS *Victory* was made, to its collection of maritime archaeology, the Dockyard forms an indispensable part of Britain's naval history and its national heritage.

Visitors to and users of The Historic Dockyard Chatham are fundamental to its purpose and the economic reuse of the site and its buildings. Its staff and volunteers play a vital role in providing a high level of service and customer care. The Trust is also involved in the ongoing regeneration of Medway and The Thames Gateway, with Culture and Heritage at its heart.

As part of the Trust's strategy of "Preservation through re-use" recent projects have secured the long-term financial sustainability (on a revenue basis) of the wider Historic Dockyard site. The economic outputs from the new uses of the recently opened Fitted Rigging House as well as other activities across the site will bring the total annual contribution made to Medway's economy to £26.3m in 2019, building on the 2012 estimate of £16m (64% growth).

About The MESS ROOM

MESS ROOM is a community arts studio based at Sun Pier House Chatham, run and co-founded by local artists Wendy Daws and Christopher Sacre.

The aim of the MESS ROOM is for people to have a space to be able to express themselves creatively using a combination of inclusive activities and communication methods including British Sign Language (BSL) and tactile materials.

For more information: messroom.org.uk

