



Press Release

Paris, August 26th, 2010

The French three masted ship Belem celebrates her British past ! **Cowes-4th and 5th of september**

The three masted ship Belem, Europe's oldest, and France's most prestigious, tall ship still operating at sea, will be calling at Cowes, on the 4th and 5th of September for a unique visit to the Royal Yacht Squadron, and to the people of the Isle of Wight to commemorate the 36 years during which she sailed under British colours, from 1914 to 1950

Built in 1896 in Nantes, Belem was at first a **merchant vessel** operating between France, Brasil and the French Caribbean. She was bought in 1914 by the second **Duke of Westminster**, who transformed her into a **luxury yacht**. In 1921 the Duke sold the ship to the Hon Arthur **Ernest Guinness** who renamed the ship "Fantôme II" and sailed her extensively, completing a round the world trip in 1923-24. He owned the ship until his death in 1949. Both the Duke and Ernest Guinness were distinguished members of the **Royal Yacht Squadron** and the ship was frequently seen in Cowes.

The Belem Foundation, who has been in charge of the now 114 years old ship since she returned under French colours in 1980, has conducted **extensive research on her British history**.

While underlining the uncommon character of a shared Franco-British maritime heritage, the ship's visit to Cowes is meant as **a tribute to her British past**, her owners, their club and **the descendants of Fantome II's crew**, many of whom live on the Isle of Wight and who have been invited to visit the ship Sunday morning before she opens to the public.

Belem, a steel hulled, 58 meters long three masted barque is today the property of the "**Fondation Belem**" who is entrusted with the mission of preserving the ship in France's maritime heritage. Belem is operated as a civilian training ship dedicated to the general public.

Cowes program for Belem

Sat 4 : 10.30am Belem berths at Trinity Landing

1.00pm: reception on board in honour of the Royal Yacht Squadron

Sun 5- 10-11am: descendants of Fantôme II's crew visit Belem

11am-6pm: Belem is open to public visits

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