



# Around Town

The best things to do in London this week Edited by Sara O'Reilly



*The Mary Rose in the Solent, with other ships of the Henrician navy, painted by Bill Bishop, 1988. below: sixteenth-century artefacts. Inset: exhibition guides Freckles and Archie*

winced-inducing medical equipment, perfectly preserved plum stones and peppercorns, cannonballs and swords, skulls and skeletons, and some of the few Tudor longbows still in existence – all professionally displayed in the school's state-of-the-art sports and conference centre alongside genuinely useful interactive elements and reconstructions of the heads of some of the crew. Designed by Whitgift's school designer and with captions by Dr Barnett himself, this is an exhibition that any central London museum would be proud to host. 'This is not in any sense provincial,' says Barnett, and he's right.

Dr Barnett points out that there are some real benefits to placing the exhibition in the school. 'You can park on site and we're used to holding events for 6,000 people because we regularly host Surrey County Cricket fixtures; there's good public transport by rail and tram; we've already got the expertise in

**'Archie the Bichon Frisé and Freckles the cavalier King Charles spaniel' will wear orange and act as 'guide dogs'**

## Coming up roses

How did a Croydon school end up hosting an exhibition about Henry VIII's flagship? **Peter Watts** gets ready to learn a lesson

One name stands out from the list of institutions celebrating various aspects of London's Tudor history in the next month or so.

Alongside the British Library, Hampton Court Palace, the National Portrait Gallery and the Tower of London sits Whitgift School, an independent boys' school in Croydon that is, astonishingly, hosting an impeccably mounted professional exhibition on the Mary Rose.

But Whitgift is no ordinary school. The charitable foundation that runs it is landowner of what seems like half of Croydon and the school itself is set in Haling Park, 45 beautiful acres that contain the school buildings as well as hockey, rugby, cricket and football pitches, a maze, lakes, an aviary, flamingos and a breeding area for red squirrels. Given this background, raising the £500,000 needed to put on the 'Hidden Treasures of The Mary Rose' exhibition – usually seen



alongside the ship in Portsmouth – was never going to be a problem, still less so when Croydon Council chipped in with £150,000. But cold cash only takes you so far, and the school has shown ambition and even a little courage in taking on a project of this scale, which showcases hundreds of stunning items rescued from the wreck of the Mary Rose, Henry VIII's flagship which sank in 1545 and was raised from the Solent seabed in 1982.

'It's extraordinary. These treasures are so fresh and exciting,' says Dr Barnett, Whitgift's headmaster and the man who decided to bring the Mary Rose to Croydon. 'Many have never left Portsmouth and 80 per cent have never been seen at all.'

So how have they ended up in a school in South Croydon? 'We are a Tudor foundation. Haling Park was owned by Henry VIII, and this summer we

are celebrating the 500th anniversary of his accession,' explains Dr Barnett. 'But there's also a navy connection – the estate was also owned by the nephew of the admiral on the Mary Rose, and Elizabeth I's flagship, the Ark Royal, which succeeded the Mary Rose, is featured on the school weathervane. I managed to persuade the trustees that this was a great opportunity to bring this to London. Many people from a certain generation remember seeing the ship brought up, it was a big thing, and most people have heard of the Mary Rose, but many people haven't been to Portsmouth, or if they have, won't have seen these items because they aren't usually on display.'

And that's not because the items are sub-standard, part of a reserve collection. There are some terrific artefacts here – remains of a sailor's jerkin with the red dye still visible,



the learning requirements that is so important for museums these days; and we're used to dealing with kids.'

Whitgift's greenness also means the school can bring a fresh eye to the whole business of exhibiting. For instance, given that one of the items being displayed for the first time is the skeleton of the ship's dog, Dr Barnett decided to expand a theme and get trained dogs – 'Bertie the Border terrier, Freckles the cavalier King Charles spaniel' – to wear orange jackets and act as 'guide dogs' for some of the school parties. Now that's something you won't find at the British Library.

'Hidden Treasures from the Mary Rose', Whitgift Conference Centre, Whitgift School, Haling Park Rd, South Croydon, CR2 6YT (8633 9939/www.maryrosehiddentreasures.org). South Croydon rail. Apr 7-Aug 7 10am-5pm daily. £8, £4 under-16s and over-65s, £18 family, pre-schoolers and prebooked school groups free.

