

Junk cruise is no junket

A morning in class or a sun-drenched cruise around the harbour? No contest...

Children from Service families at a Portsmouth school were treated to a two-hour trip on Boleh, a unique yacht which has the oriental lines of a junk or dhow.

The recently-restored Boleh – her name is Malay for ‘yes’ or ‘can do’ – has been supporting the Pompey’s Military Kids (PMK) cluster group after Henry Middleton, of the Boleh Trust, heard about the group through Portsmouth City Council.

Henry contacted Nicola Thompson, Families Engagement Officer with the Naval Families Federation and the driving force behind the cluster, and Nicola organised trips for pupils of Service families who were keen to try their hand on a sailing boat.

The first PMK pupils to sail Boleh were from Years 7 to 10 at Mayfield School, one of them being 15-year-old Ruby Hughes, whose father is a former sailor.

“I really enjoyed it,” said Ruby. “It was the first time I have been on a ship like that – usually I’ve just been on board ships where my Dad worked.

“Steering was the best part. We went up to the end of the harbour, and I steered it most of the way up. It was hard work – you have to fight against the wind, but I got the hang of it.

“I would definitely do it again. I learned about what kind of ship it was, and things like tacking and going against the wind. Doing the ropes was good, too, but very confusing – it’s not as easy as it looks.”

Accompanying the groups was Ben Currier, Head of Languages at Mayfield, and himself a Forces child.

“My Dad is Navy,” said Ben. “He was in the Falklands – he used to be a Leading Chef, but he’s now retired. He deployed a lot, and during my childhood he wasn’t about too often, so I feel an affinity for these pupils.

“It was amazing today. The weather was lovely, and the kids have really enjoyed themselves. And they were really capable – they were not afraid to try things like handling the ropes. There was no fear.

“This was the first time today, but if we get invited again we would certainly take the opportunity – you just have to see how happy they are.”

Boleh was designed and built by Naval aviator Cdr Robin Kilroy – Henry’s uncle – in Singapore in 1948, and sailed the 16,000 miles to Devon so she could be used as a family boat.

Some 30 years later she became a sail training ship for young people, then a houseboat in Sussex before she was almost destroyed by fire. Saved from the scrapyard by Roger Angel, who sailed her in the Med, Boleh was eventually bought by Henry and his brother George in 2008, and was restored in 2015 by a team that included apprentices learning traditional boatbuilding skills.

The Boleh Trust has its own military links – Henry is an RAF veteran, while George, the chairman of the Trust, served in the Royal Navy, as did lead skipper Kevin Hood. Crew member William Barker-Wyatt, now a Civil Servant, is a former soldier.

The Trust recently received a grant of almost £5,000 from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust to support the PMK/Portsmouth City Council initiative, which means by October more than 100 Service children will have had the chance to sail on the yacht.

www.bolehproject.com

www.nff.org.uk/pompeys-military-kids-club/

