



NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM CORNWALL PRESENTS

SURF!

Major New Exhibition Opens 28 March 2025



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Making waves this spring, **SURF!** opens at **National Maritime Museum Cornwall** - a major new exhibition exploring the history and cultural impact of surfing in Cornwall.

Celebrating the culture, craft, art and activism of Cornwall's surf scene, the exhibition documents a century of Cornish waveriding. From the wooden bellyboards of the 1920s made by local coffin makers, to charismatic stand-up surf pioneers of the 1930s and 1940s, through to the birth of the surf industry in the 1960s, iconic longboard artworks in the 2000s, to the para surfing World

Champions of today, *SURF!* provides a unique deep-dive into how Cornwall has evolved into 'the California of the UK', becoming a breeding ground for world champion surfers and multiple creative industries, from board-building to wetsuit production, magazine media to filmmaking and fashion.

Curated by surf academic **Dr. Sam Bleakley**, the object-rich exhibition will feature a vast array of artefacts with exciting human stories and hidden histories sourced from private collections around the UK. Many of the objects, including some of the world's most valuable surfboards, original tools, photographs, videos and artwork, have never before been on public display.

Highlights include **100 surfboards** that collectively tell the story of 100 years of Cornish waveriding, from early 4-foot wooden bellyboards to pioneering eco and adaptive boards of the future. Among them will be boards that have played a key role in Cornish surfing history, including those used by global surfing champions, such as Robyn Davies, Pegleg Bennett, Charlotte Banfield and Ben Skinner. Measuring in at an impressive 37-feet, the original record-setting **world's biggest surfboard** will be displayed, able to carry 15 surfers at any one time. A testimony to the impact of surfing on culture more broadly, there will also be a display of original artboards, including the first-ever public exhibition of **Damian Hirst's** stunning butterfly board on loan from the Maia Norman collection. Other artboards from renowned artists, such as **Polly Morgan, Paul Smith, Julian Schnabel** and **Nina Blake**, will also be featured, alongside a beautiful poetry-engraved wooden board from award-winning Cornish boardmaker **James Otter**.

Harking back to the surf industry's emergence in the 1960s, audiences will be invited to step inside a recreation of Newquay's original **Bilbo Surf Shop**, a hub of the Cornish surf scene, before peeping into an original **1965 VW Transporter campervan** brought to life with the sounds and smells of the 60s. Further surf ephemera will include a selection of iconic **surf posters** from the past 100 years, spanning everything from sport to travel and tourism to cinema; a selection of **vintage swimwear and wetsuits** from the 1930s-1960; an array of **surf magazines**; iconic **vintage surf photography**. There will also be a presentation of the **first and only surf film narrated in Cornish**, made by musician, filmmaker and champion bodyboarder, Mickey Smith.

As well as surf culture and aesthetics, the exhibition will also explore the politics of surfing. While tensions once existed between surfing and wider tourism, with surfing banned on some Cornish beaches (thought to attract the 'wrong kind' of tourist), today waveriding is hugely significant to Cornwall, generating £150 million per year for the county. Surfing is also playing a key role in driving blue health and surf therapy initiatives, as well as environmental activism.

Cascading into the exhibition space will be a specially commissioned six-metre wave sculpture by artist **Abigail Falls**, made of recycled plastic bottles, a homage to Cornish marine conservation charity Surfers Against Sewage and their work fighting to protect the oceans.

Running until 2027, *SURF!* is a celebration of a unique pastime that has transformed Cornwall over a hundred years into a place of aspiration, art, and the buzz of the new. The exhibition will be accompanied by an ambitious programme including Museum Lates, lectures, film events, and surf art and craft workshops.

Sam Bleakley, surf academic and curator of *SURF!*, said:

"Cornwall has been shaped by the 'cool' of surfing for over 100 years. With its convoluted coastline, wide open to Atlantic swells, the region has become a breeding ground for blue health, art and activism. Cornish surfers were pivotal in founding Surfers Against Sewage in 1990 and in 2010, the NHS piloted the world's first surf therapy programme in Cornwall, The Wave Project, which helped progress world champion para-surfers like Charlotte Banfield. It is no longer simply surfers against sewage, but surfers for sustainability and for public health, spearheaded by the blue health movement that calls for us all to reconnect with ocean-based activities and keep our shared coastline clean. SURF! will not only be an inspiring journey through Cornwall's surfing heritage, but a sensory feast, celebrating the enormous impact of waveriding in Cornwall".

Richard Doughty, Director of National Maritime Museum Cornwall, said:

"SURF! explores how surfing has shaped Cornwall's coastal communities and perceptions of Cornwall's identity, how it is challenging stereotypes of disability and how it is changing public attitudes to water safety and the marine environment. At its core, the exhibition extends and deepens our commitment to genuine cultural co-creation, platforming different and diverse stories which celebrate the rich cultural, social, and environmental impact of surfing in Cornwall, as an innovative form of sustainable leisure, tourism, fashion and blue health."

-Ends-

Notes to Editors:

For further press information, images and interview requests please contact Sophie Stott or Sophia Hammond at Margaret on sophiestott@margaretlondon.com / sophia@margaretlondon.com

EXHIBITION LISTINGS INFORMATION:

SURF!

Opens Friday 28 March 2025 to January 2027

National Maritime Museum Cornwall

Discovery Quay

Falmouth

Cornwall TR11 3QY

Tel: 01326 313388

www.nmmc.co.uk

Social Media:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/theNMMC>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/theNMMC>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/nationalmaritimemuseumcornwall>

Museum opening times: every day of the year from 10am - 5pm, except Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Boxing Day.

Prices: Adults £18.00, Children £9.00, Under 5s Free

About National Maritime Museum Cornwall:

Located on Discovery Quay, in Falmouth on the South Cornwall coast, National Maritime Museum Cornwall has 15 galleries over five floors. With a collection that spans The National Small Boat collection, exciting temporary exhibitions, artworks, maps and charts, memorabilia and other objects, and a boatbuilding workshop, the museum celebrates and explores the overwhelming influence of the sea on history and culture, bringing new and diverse perspectives to maritime issues, and highlighting their relevance to the present day. Winner of the 2014 Telegraph Family Friendly Museum Award and 'Best Gallery' at the 2017 What's on Cornwall Awards