**Thursday 16 May**

**Royal Naval train honoured at Preston Station for its role during the World Wars**

* *Plaque unveiled to commemorate Royal Navy train, Jellicoe Express, that first served Preston over 100 years ago*

Virgin Trains has unveiled a commemorative plaque at Preston station honouring the Jellicoe Express – the Royal Naval train that transported hundreds of soldiers and sailors during the World Wars.

Recently unveiled by Captain Chris Smith RN, Preston was the final station in England to be adorned with a plaque to recognise its role more than a century ago.

Virgin Trains worked with Another Orkney Production, the heritage group behind the project, to place plaques at each of the 18 stations served by the Jellicoe Express.

The unveiling of the plaque, marked the centenary of journeys made on the Royal Naval train, during the First World War

Named after Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, the commander of the Grand Fleet who led the British forces at the Battle of Jutland in June 1916, the Jellicoe Express carried service personnel to and from the British fleet based at Scapa Flow in Orkney - travelling daily between London Euston and Thurso in Scotland with a journey time of 21hours 30minutes.

The plaque provides a permanent memorial to the Jellicoe Express, which served the city as part of its 717-mile journey.

Preston station was one of the few stops on the route where sailors and soldiers could join the train. It also served as a welcome refreshment stop, where women volunteers worked around the clock to provide refreshments on the platform.

Shirley Ross, Virgin Trains Station Manager at Preston, said: “We’re extremely proud to be able to celebrate and commemorate Preston’s heritage in this way. Preston station played an important role as the Jellicoe Express made its journey between London Euston and Thurso, and today it continues to be a key hub on our west coast route. We are delighted to have been involved in the project and ensure the Jellicoe Express – and the brave men and women who took that journey in both World Wars - will forever be remembered.”

Johnny Jellicoe, grandson of the Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, said: “It has been an enormous honour to play a part in the commemorative plaques installed at each station along an epic train line that was named after my grandfather. During both World Wars the railway was a lifeblood to communities local to these stations and it continues to be so today. Hearing the amazing stories and personal experiences of those closest to the Jellicoe Express has been a complete privilege. This project has brought people together to create a lasting legacy that commemorates the servicemen and women and those who kept the Jellicoe Express running day in, day out.”

Moya McDonald, Project Co-ordinator at Another Orkney Production, said: “It has been an honour to work on this project. Since April 2017, 17 plaques have been installed at stations where the Royal Naval train stopped on its daily journey of 717 miles between Euston and Thurso in both World Wars – with Preston being the last station in England before the final plaque is unveiled at Forsinard. Many people and organisations helped to make this project happen and we are very grateful to them all, especially Virgin Trains who could not have been more helpful.”

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**About Virgin Trains**

Stagecoach and Virgin are working in partnership to operate the West Coast inter-city route under the Virgin Trains brand, revolutionising travel on one of the UK’s key rail arteries.

The network connects some of the nation’s most iconic destinations including Glasgow, Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester and London.

Virgin Trains is committed to delivering a high speed, high frequency service, offering shorter journey times, more comfortable travel and excellent customer service. Customers consistently rate Virgin Trains ahead of other long-distance rail franchise operators in the National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS) commissioned by industry watchdog, Transport Focus.

Virgin Trains has a proud record of challenging the status quo - from introducing tilting Pendolino trains, to a pioneering automated delay repay scheme, introducing the industry-leading onboard entertainment streaming service, BEAM, and becoming the first franchised rail operator to offer m-Tickets for all ticket types.

Virgin Trains operated the East Coast route between March 1, 2015 and June 24, 2018. In that time, we invested £75m to create a more personalised travel experience, including over £40m in the existing fleet. Customers have benefitted from 48 additional services between Edinburgh and London every week, and an extra 22 Saturday services between Leeds and London – a total of 1.74 million additional seats since May 2015.

Working together, the partnership railway of the public and private sectors has published a long-term plan, called *In Partnership for Britain’s Prosperity,* to change and improve Britain’s railway. The plan will secure almost £85bn of additional economic benefits to the country whilst enabling further investment and improvement, and contains four commitments which will see rail companies: strengthen our economic contribution to the country; improve customers’ satisfaction; boost the communities we serve; and, create more and better jobs in rail. For more information go to [Britain Runs on Rail](http://www.britainrunsonrail.co.uk/?gclid=CjwKCAiAr_TQBRB5EiwAC_QCq9OA-y_Al1Voo4ZvYjMvSBs86kuvjZLD8MfFvnOUU9UeVZ1T5CObLRoCasIQAvD_BwE).

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Press Office: 0845 000 3333.