3.0 Understanding the Heritage

THE NMRN HERITAGE covered by this report is diverse, and has been acquired by the Museum from a wide range of sources. Although some of the ‘origin’ collections described here were first assembled before the First World War, much of this heritage has only been transferred to the Museum’s ownership over the last 8 years from organisations outside the long-standing naval museums. This section therefore sets out both the origins of the Museum’s collections, and their recent development through major acquisitions. Figure 1 sets out a timeline to summarise collection development to February 2018. This section also looks ahead to further collections development that is planned through the project, whether this is through the associated collections which will form future transfers or the select acquisition and contemporary recording that will inform exhibitions.

The description of the heritage here is consciously set to be broad, and goes wider than the heritage which will be included in the exhibition spaces of either the New Royal Marines Museum or Storyhouse 12: The Navy Unlocked, or indeed the collections within S12’s storage spaces. It is felt useful to give a comprehensive picture of ‘the newest national collection’ because, even if not all elements are physically moved into these renovated buildings, some will be included in other ways – for example as digital assets made accessible by the project, as selected items featured within flexible displays. Others elements have significant supporting archive material which will be moved even if original artefacts are not. Thus, the description includes our ‘ships, boats and other craft’, despite the fact that only one of these will be physically moved through the project, because all ships have original manuscripts and photographs relating to their design, construction and use which will be moved.
Equally, it is expected that the collections within Storyhouse 12: The Navy Unlocked will change over time – for example as our current permanent and special exhibitions change. S12 will be the hub of the Museum’s collections management, and there will be opportunities to move material between collection stores and to feature items from collections usually stored on other sites, such as the Fleet Air Arm Museum. Figure 2 sets out which collections are likely to be moved initially to the S12, and broader collection use within the project.4

The description of collections which follows aims only to give a top level summary by collection type – using the same basic collection categories as the Museum’s collecting policy, with minor updates on number and range of each type. Where appropriate reference is made to published catalogues of collections which provide more detail. Given the breadth of the story told by the NMRN it is important to understand links between the Museum’s heritage and related material held by other museum and archive collections, and indeed material still held within the Navy. This section therefore sets this heritage in context and describes how, and how far, management and collection development is co-ordinated. As the NMRN has developed, and other organisations have joined, the overall system for governance, oversight and management of the collection has also changed. This section describes this system, and the resources that support it, as well as looking in detail at the current facilities available for the care of the collection across different sites.

4 Collections Development Policy, NMRN, 9 September 2015

1 Last white ensign to fly at the masthead of HMS Manners following attack by U-1051 during which the stern was damaged by an acoustic torpedo, and four officers and 39 ratings were killed.

2 Chain Mail shirt taken by Royal Marines during their campaign in Sudan, 1893.