3.1 History of the Collections

3.1.1 Origins of the Collections

The National Museum of the Royal Navy was formally established as a charitable trust in 2008, and launched publicly in September 2009. At its creation the collections described here were owned and controlled by separate charitable trusts which ran the original four naval museums: the Royal Naval Museum (RNM), the Royal Marines Museum, the Royal Navy Submarine Museum (RNSM), and the Fleet Air Arm Museum (FAAM).

Since September 2009, a process of merger has taken place and the separate boards of the original museums have dissolved, in sequence: RNM (2010), RMM (2014), RNSM (2016), FAAM (2016). A single NMRN Board of Trustees is now responsible for all staff and activity across these Museums, and ultimately controls all decisions relating to care, management, acquisition and disposal from collections. The charitable trusts remain in place to own the collection assets, but the NMRN has control as the sole corporate trustee. It is this which has created a new national collection and presented the opportunities for improvements in collections management and information described in Section 6.

National Museum of the Royal Navy - Portsmouth

The origins of the collections at the Portsmouth site are in the Dockyard Museum assembled from relics acquired by Robert Pesce-Frost (established in 1911) and the Victory Museum (established in 1938). These collections were amalgamated at the creation of the Royal Naval Museum in 1972, and were developed significantly by bequest, gift, purchase, transfer or loan with items relating to the history of the Royal Navy, and its people, throughout the area of its worldwide operations.

Significant early loans of private collections – the Lily Lambert McCarthy Collection of Nelson material, and the Sir Kenneth Douglas-Morris Collection of Naval General Service and Campaign Medals – were later converted in large part to bequests.

The Trustees agreed for the Royal Naval Museum to change its name to the National Museum of the Royal Navy, Portsmouth in 2009, and this decision was approved by the Charity Commission in 2010.

Royal Marines Museum

The origins of the collections at the Royal Marines Museum are based on artefacts from the Corps’ messes at the home of the Royal Marines Divisions at Chatham, Portsmouth (Eastney) and Plymouth. These barracks took in historical objects throughout their lives, with particular weight given to medals, uniforms and battlefield trophies. The Royal Marines Museum itself was established in 1958 and these core collections have been expanded significantly by bequest, gift, purchase, transfer or loan since.

1. The first display of relics in the Dockyard Museum, 1911.

2. Trench art from the Dardanelles Campaign, 1915.
**Royal Navy Submarine Museum**

The Royal Navy Submarine Museum was created at HMS Dolphin in 1963. Having been formally recognised by the Ministry of Defence in 1967, it became a charity in 1970. In 1978 the Museum moved out of the naval establishment, providing full access to members of the public for the first time.

The collection is based in particular around three historic boats (Holland 1, X24 and HMS Alliance), the wider collections have been developed to cover all aspects of operational history of Royal Navy submarines, as well as the social history surrounding the ‘Silent Service’ since its establishment in 1901. Weapons relating to underwater warfare, and artwork make up key parts of the collections.

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**Fleet Air Arm Museum**

The Fleet Air Arm Museum was established in May 1964 and the Fleet Air Arm Museum Charitable Trust was subsequently established in 1966. The Fleet Air Arm collection has been developed to cover the history of the Royal Naval Air Service and Fleet Air Arm from inception in 1914 to the present day. Focused around a unique collection of naval specification aircraft, covering fixed wing biplanes and monoplanes, and helicopter designs, there is a large supporting collection of material including engineering parts, air-launched weaponry, and personal clothing and equipment.

In 2000 a state-of-the-art collections store named Cobham Hall was opened. This has allowed much of the undisplayed collections at FAAM to be transferred into an environmentally controlled and secure facility.
3.1.2 RECENT DEVELOPMENT OF THE COLLECTIONS

Alongside the process of merger of the original four naval museums, significant parts of naval heritage have also been transferred to the control of NMRN, or its subsidiaries, since 2009. These include:

**HMS Victory**

HMS Victory, floated out in 1765, is a unique 18th century wooden first rate, was Admiral Lord Nelson’s flagship at the Battle of Trafalgar and the only surviving ship of the line from the days of sail. The ship was brought into No.1 Dock in Portsmouth Royal Dockyard in 1922, restored through the ‘Save the Victory Fund’ established by the Society for Naval Research, and opened to the public in 1928. The ship was owned and maintained by the Navy until ownership of the ship was transferred to the Museum, specifically the HMS Victory Preservation Company, on 29 March 2012. The transfer included a collection of original artefacts and fittings on board which relate to HMS Victory and other ships of the period, as well as original material of archaeological interest that has been removed from the ship during restoration but is of evidential significance.  

**HMS Caroline**

HMS Caroline was built as a light cruiser in 1914 and then served in the Grand Fleet until 1918, including at the Battle of Jutland on 31 May 1916 – of which she is the only surviving British ship. Caroline served at sea until 1924 and then became a Drill Ship and base of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve in Belfast, taking on a succession of roles through the Second World War, and post-war, until this use ceased in 2009. She was decommissioned in March 2011, when the Museum took on day-to-day responsibility, before transfer in 2013. Transfer of ownership included a large collection of fixtures, fittings and artefacts relating to different parts of her service life, as well as document and photographic archive. Significant material, in particular relating to her officers and crew during sea-going service 1914-1924 has been added to NMRN collections since.

**Explosion Museum of Naval Firepower**

Throughout the 20th century successive superintendents of the Royal Naval Armaments Depot at Priddy’s Hard in Portsmouth Harbour assembled a significant collection of large underwater, surface and air weapons including mines, torpedoes, guns, launchers, small arms, missiles and a strong supporting archive. After the Depot ceased to be an operational establishment in 1989, ownership was transferred to a separate Trust, and Explosion Museum of Naval Firepower was opened on 30 April 2001; it was transferred to Gosport Borough Council the following year. Ownership again changed in 2009 to the Portsmouth Naval Base Property Trust and then permanently to NMRN(PI) in April 2013. Since 2013 significant new acquisitions to the collection have been made directly into the National Museum of the Royal Navy (Portsmouth) collection.

**HMS M33**

HMS M33 was built as a small, specialised gun platform in 7 weeks, and is the only surviving British ship from the Dardanelles Campaign of 1915 and the Russian Civil War, 1918-1919. The ship was used in a number of roles until 1984, when as Hulk C23 she was put up for sale and acquired by the Ship Preservation Trust, Hartlepool. She was bought by Hampshire County Council in 1991 and partially restored, until a joint project between NMRN and HCC funded her conservation, partial restoration, and opening to the public in August 2015. Ownership of the ship, and an archive of original and copy documents relating to her construction, service and crew was transferred to the Museum in 2014.

**HMS Trincomalee**

HMS Trincomalee is a Leda-class frigate built in the East India Company shipyard Bombay (modern day Mumbai) in 1817, and the only surviving British example of a frigate from this period. The ship spent many years in ordinary, but was commissioned twice between 1847-57 before being based in Sunderland, Hartlepool and Southampton. She was seen bought by the Geoffrey Wheatley Cobb and opened as a training ship under the new name Foudroyant in 1905 – a role that was maintained either in private or Royal Navy until 1980, having trained approximately 70,000 young boys and girls. The ship was restored at Hartlepool between 1987 and 2002 and opened to the public, and was transferred to the
NMRN in April 2016. The transfer included a small associated collection of artefacts and archives relating to different phases of her life, including for example the diaries of Wheatley Cobb.11 This transfer is a significant addition to the range and quality of the NMRN’s collection of Art, containing works for example by: Nicholas Pocock (1740–1821), Norman Wilkinson (1878–1971) and Muirhead Bone (1876–1953). The NMRN physically transferred 30 items from store in MOD Main Building in May 2017; other material remains in their loan locations at the date of transfer, a plan for their management and use by the Museum is in preparation. The oil paintings were included in the Public Catalogue Foundation project and are now listed under new ownership @www.artuk.org.uk; further published background to the collection is available.13

**HMS Warrior**

HMS Warrior is the world’s first iron-hulled armoured warship, and at launch in 1860 became the Navy’s fastest, largest and most powerful ship. The ship’s active service was relatively short, as after 10 years a series of technological changes had left the ship behind, and the ship became successively a reserve ship, training hulk, and oil storage platform.14 Between 1979 and 1987 the ship was fully restored in Hartlepool before towing to Portsmouth to open to the public in 1987. Warrior was transferred to the NMRN in July 2017, along with a significant collection of around 1,200 artefacts and archives which are either displayed onboard or being processed off the ship. These including the original letter books of Warrior’s first captain, Admiral Arthur Cochrane (1824–1905), as well as personal artefacts relating to the crew in her first commission.

**Figure 1** Timeline of NMRN Collection Development to 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>Dacdyar Museum established</td>
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<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>Victory Museum established</td>
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<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Royal Marines Museum established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>Royal Navy Submarine Museum established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Fleet Air Arm Museum established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Royal Naval Museum established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>NMRN established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>HMS Victory transferred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>HMS Caroline transferred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Explosion Collection transferred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>HMS M33 transferred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>MOD Art Collection and HMS Warrior transferred</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8 See summary in guidebook, HMS Victory, NMRN, 2017.
9 See summary of history in guidebook, HMS Caroline, NMRN, 2016
10 See summary of history in guidebook, HMS M33, NMRN, 2015
11 See summary of history in guidebook, HMS Trincomalee, NMRN, 2017
13 Charlotte Henwood, Bequests to the Nation: an introduction to the MOD Art Collection, 2002
14 See Andrew Lambert, HMS Warrior 1860: Victoria’s Ironclad Deterrent, 2010
3.1.3 ASSOCIATED COLLECTIONS

Coastal Forces Heritage Trust

The Coastal Forces Heritage Trust (CFHT) exists ‘to preserve the history of the Royal Navy’s Coastal Forces’, which operated from 1917-1956. CFHT is an affiliate organisation of the NMRN, with an existing joint project based on the restoration and display of two important historic boats: Motor Torpedo Boat 71 and Coastal Motor Boat. The Trust also owns a relatively small, but important collection on the development and operations of this specialist branch, consisting of: models, documents, photographs and comprehensive video histories of coastal forces veterans. The NMRN team have been offering interim advice on the collection which is currently inaccessible in poor quality storage; CFHT have agreed to transfer ownership of the collection to coincide with the opening of £12.

The Admiralty Library

The formal origin of the ‘Admiralty Library’ is the Order in Council of 1809 which appointed a ‘Keeper of Records’ to the Admiralty, who from 1812 received an addition of £50 to his salary of £500 for acting as Librarian.

For its first 100 years this was a library for staff at the Admiralty in Whitehall, used by members of the Board of Admiralty, the Board’s Secretary and others in the Admiralty Office and Hydrographer’s Office. From its foundation it contained historic material which we know was used as a source of reference, for example John Croker (1780-1857) as Secretary to the Admiralty was drew on the precedent books compiled by Thomas Corbett (d.1751). It also became a natural repository for current sources of information, and growth is illustrated through a succession of catalogues.15

In 1911 the Library moved to a specially fitted-out reading room on the top two floors of the newly-built Admiralty Arch. This coincided with other developments such as the founding of the Navy Records Society (1893) and the Society for Nautical Research (1911) which sought to use history to inform the Navy’s strategy. The Times wrote, ‘Of late years it has become more generally recognized that the growth of a scientific spirit in naval warfare necessitates the study of naval history’. A few dissenting voices were raised, notably the ‘Naval and Military Record’ which noted ‘the high agreement setting out responsibilities for care and public access. This provides a major historical reference library, including a unique manuscript collection, consisting of 700 volumes, 650 loose maps and plans and major collections of personal papers.16

This is a manuscript library rather than an archive and the most interesting parts are in the various private papers of Admiralty officials, the diaries, order books, signal books, maps and charts, and accounts of exploration.

3.1.4

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

A number of specific opportunities for collections development have already been identified within the project. These include: acquisition of contemporary equipment including Viking amphibious vehicle, Offshore Raiding Craft for the (New Royal Marines Museum), commissioning of contemporary art (Storyhouse 12: The Navy Unlocked). Further, and fuller details are described in Stage 3 exhibition design, and in the project’s draft Activity Plan.

However, there are also future collection transfers which the project will enable.

Records of Priddy’s Hard * 1690-1987

Hampshire Record Office (HRO) in Winchester has held currently 300 boxes, 50 linear metres, of records which were transferred from Priddy’s Hard Ordnance Yard in 1991. The records are an important record both of the site (now the site of the NMRN’s Explosion Museum and collection) and its operation, but also of wider ordnance activity relating to the Royal Navy – including for example a series of ‘gun logs’, tracing the movement of guns between ships. The records are held at HRO on deposit from the National Archives (TNA), and TNA have agreed to the principle of their transfer to S12 subject to it meeting the requirements to become a ‘Place of Deposit’. The transfer is likely to be take place six months or so after opening, when the Centre has operationally bedded down.

HMS Invincible

The NMRN is currently working in partnership with the Maritime Archaeology Sea Trust (MAST) on the project ‘Diving Deep’ relating to the wreck of HMS Invincible. The 74 gun L’Invincible was originally built for the French Navy in 1744 and fought during the Austrian War of Succession until captured by the Royal Navy in 1747. She was commissioned into service and her design copied, becoming the model for British 74 gun ships of the line for much of the 18th century. The ship sunken and was then wrecked on the Horse Tail Sands ~ 4 miles off Portsmouth ~ on 19 February 1758. The exposed port side of the ship was extensively excavated between 1980 and 1991, but the site is now affected by rapid erosion and in 2012 was placed on Historic England’s Heritage at Risk Register. In spring 2016 MAST was awarded £2.027m in LIBOR funding for a project to record, and excavate areas of the newly exposed starboard side and to conserve and provide access to finds; the ‘Diving Deep’ HLF project (Round 2 application submitted by MAST in February 2018) will. The project will run through three dive seasons in 2017, 2018 and 2019; any material raised will be conserved by Bournemouth University and, under a memorandum of understanding, title to all material raised will be granted free of charge to the NMRN. The first dive season has raised a range of finds: cordage, gun wads, bottles, shoe buckles, buttons, coins. This material is likely to be transferred in 2020, and will join a small collection of items from the 1980-1991 excavations within NMRN collections.

Mary Rose

The Mary Rose Trust holds a sizeable archaeological archive, which documents the excavation of the Mary Rose wreck site and its finds, which is currently stored in relatively poor conditions in their College Lane office building within Portsmouth Historic Dockyard. At Round 1 it was agreed to explore the opportunities to improve care of and access to this collection within the Centre, and the terms on which it would be accommodated. It will not now be possible to include these collections, because of the requirements for the NMRN collections described below (see Section 6.0), and for spaces to support activity and interpretation. Therefore, it has been agreed not to take discussions any further.

17 See HRD catalogue reference 109393, www3.hants.gov.uk/archives.htm
18 See HLF Application HG 14-09064, Diving Deep: the HMS Invincible 1744 Project