

Meshellae Payne SHTP2 July Blog

Back to Red:
Returning to the National Museum of the Royal Navy



The first couple of weeks in July sailed past as normal with me keeping to my established working from home routine of digitisation and cataloguing, whilst peppering my days with various talks and documentaries on different maritime heritage and sailing topics. Then, halfway through the month, my routine was shaken up when I heard that everything was all set for my return to the National Museum of the Royal Navy (NMRN).

Even though I've known since June that my return to the NMRN was imminent, it still came as a delightful shock when it finally happened. Not only would I get to go back to work but I would be working with the conservation team, picking up where I left off and getting to gain more experience in the field I love.

My first day back was mostly spent getting re-acclimatised to the museum and helping the conservator, Morgan, to set up her new conservation lab. It was good to see what materials are needed to set up a lab and the considerations that go into storing different solvents and other chemicals. I spent most of the rest of the week packing and transporting artefacts for the Victory Gallery to the newly refurbished Storehouse 12. The new conservation lab is located in this building, so it made sense to store the artefacts



here so they could easily be accessed and conserved. In order to safely pack the objects, I used Japanese tissue paper to create a nest for each object. They were then packed in archival storage boxes which were also lined in the tissue paper, to make sure the objects were nicely cushioned.



By placing the objects in nests, rather than completely wrapping them in the tissue paper, anyone wanting to look at or handle a specific object wouldn't have to go searching through the box and unwrapping the other objects to find the one they were looking for.



On the Friday of that week I was introduced to my new big project, conserving a section of HMS *Victory's* mast from Trafalgar. The mast section actually has a hole made by a canon ball during the battle, and is on loan from the Royal Collections Trust, so it is quite an important object. I am thrilled to be getting the chance to work on something so significant!



My first step to approaching conserving the mast was to look over its previous condition statement, and see if there had been any further deterioration. Next, I took a series of photographs to record the state of the mast prior to conservation, focusing on the areas that would need more extensive treatment. With this information I began writing a treatment proposal, outlining the methods I thought would work best for treating the mast. I worked on this treatment proposal on and off over the next few days, researching different approaches and trying to figure out which would be the most suitable for the mast. On the next Wednesday morning, I discussed my proposal with Morgan, who suggested a few alternative treatments and proposed that I do adhesive testing to check the appearance and reversibility of three different adhesives.

To perform the test, I painted 6 stripes on a piece of wood, and labelled them. Each letter was for a different adhesive, and on the 1st stripe I brushed a layer of the adhesive, and on the 2nd I brushed that same adhesive with some silica mixed in, so that I could see how effective the silica was at taking away some of the gloss that the adhesive can bring to painted wood. Later I will try to remove the adhesives from the wood to test the reversibility of each.



The last week of July was quite a busy one. Other than working on my treatment proposal, I also received some training in the museum database system, Adlib. Adlib is a searchable database where museums can upload all of their various project documentation and object information and link everything together. This will allow museum staff to easily access the information they need and more simply coordinate with other departments. It is

definitely something I would like to get more experience working with as most museums have a system like this and it would be incredibly valuable to understand how to use and maintain it.

Other tasks that week included collecting environmental data and setting past traps on HMS *Victory* and HMS *Warrior*, talking to the Head Ship Keeper on HMS *Warrior* about canvas and sail making, and taking down and trying to figure out a way to effectively clean a canvas screen from one of the ladders on HMS *Warrior*. On Thursday and Friday, I finally got started with the conservation of *Victory's* mast, and whiled away many hours carefully dusting and dry-cleaning the mast to remove the majority of the surface dust and dirt. After a consultation with Morgan, we've decided that the best way forward will be to wet-clean the mast, as a test of this method showed that it removed a lot of the ingrained dirt and vastly improved the appearance of the mast.

Next month I'll get started with wet cleaning the mast and working to consolidate it with my chosen adhesive once that testing is completed!