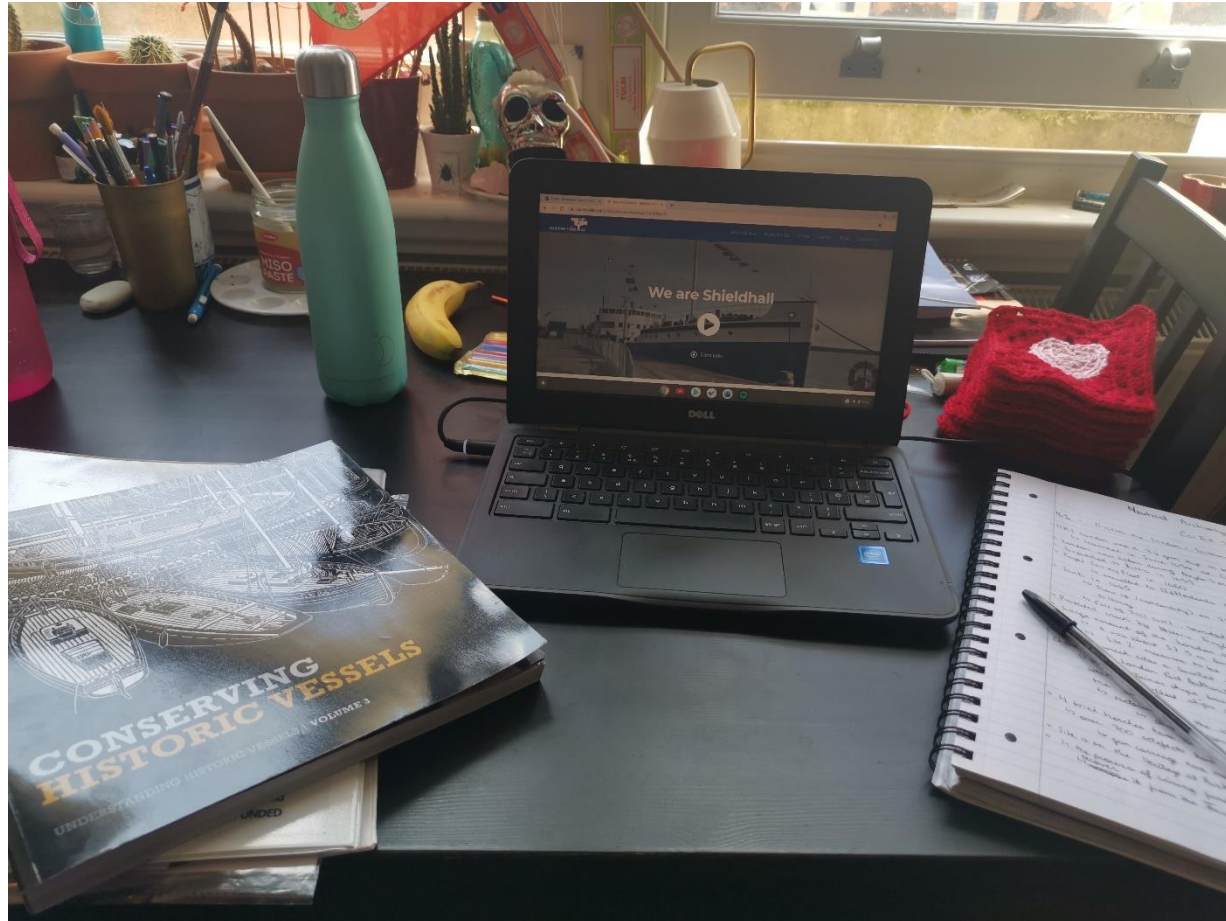


Meshellae Payne SHTP2 Blog 6 - APRIL

Building Knowledge whilst Locked Down



When reflecting on the month of April the thing that sticks out most is just how swiftly it seemed to pass by. You would think that with having to spend a whole month inside (apart from the occasional grocery trip or walk), the time would drag and seem to stretch; but the opposite was actually true. I found myself sitting down at the beginning of the day with a list of things to do, and before I knew it, the work day was over and it was time to move onto leisure activities (I've learned how to crochet!). It's hard to definitively say why this is the case, but I believe it might be due to the variety of things that I can focus on whilst quarantining. If I ever found my concentration beginning to drift off with one task, I would take it as a sign that it was time to focus on something else for a while. The wealth of resources made available online by different organisations, and helpfully compiled by the SHTP2 project organisers, enabled me to easily find new things to focus on. So not only do the days pass quickly by, but I can keep engaged and feeling like I am rapidly expanding my knowledge base.

That's not to say that the month has gone completely smoothly, there was a bit of a teething time where I often found myself lamenting on the opportunities that this crisis has made everyone miss out on. However, I've chosen to view it as a time when I can prepare myself through research, online courses, and different activities that will expand upon my knowledge and enable me to make more informed decisions once we all fully return to the working world



The first week of April was mostly spent working on the pest traps that I had collected from HMS Warrior, HMS Victory and HMS M.33 before the lockdown came into effect. Each trap has a number and location noted on it, so I would record these and then identify the insects in each trap, counting the number of each insect and recording it on an excel sheet.

When I grew tired of counting bugs, I would read through some of the conservation texts the Conservator at Portsmouth had provided me with, taking notes to build up my knowledge of different theories and techniques.

For the first week or so this was the pattern I stuck to, either counting bugs or doing research, until Becky, the SHTP2 Project Coordinator, helpfully provided us with a list of resources that we could take a look at over the quarantine. I was thereafter able to pepper some of these into my daily routine, as there were a lot of interesting videos, and websites to watch and explore. Becky also provide me with the details for a digitisation project working to recreate the crew lists of Royal Navy ships for the First World War by transcribing service records. It is a joint project being run by the National Archives and National Maritime Museum. I was set up with this project halfway through April, and ever since I've been ending almost every week day transcribing records, as I find it's a calming and interesting activity to finish the work day off with. Trying to decipher some of the handwriting can be a challenge at times but it is quite rewarding once you get it! I'm often able to rope my housemates into helping me decipher some of it as well, and surprisingly (or unsurprisingly?), the one of us with the worst handwriting is often the best at figuring it out!

The image displays a handwritten service record for John William Tebble, ADM 188/888/K10514. The record includes his name, date of birth (19 June 1892), and place of birth (Gibraltar, Spain). It details his service on several ships, including Pembroke II, Black Prince, and Blenheim, with columns for ship name, rating, and dates of service. The digital transcription on the right shows the same information in a structured format, including a table of ship assignments with columns for ship name, rating, and dates.

Row	Ship	Rating	From	To
			D M Y	D M Y
13		Sto 1C	27 6 1916	
1	Pembroke II	Sto 2C	16 2 1911	11 8 1911
2	Black Prince	Sto 2C	12 8 1911	13 3 1912
3	Black Prince	Sto 1C	14 3 1912	22 4 1912
4	Pembroke II	Sto 1C	23 4 1912	30 4 1912
5	Blenheim	Sto 1C	1 5 1912	30 9 1913
6	Egmont	Sto 1C	1 10 1913	31 3 1914
7	Blenheim (Sava...)	Sto 1C	1 4 1914	21 6 1914
8	Sulby	Sto 1C	22 6 1914	12 7 1914
9	Pembroke II	Sto 1C	13 7 1914	28 7 1914
10	Russell	Sto 1C	29 7 1914	1 5 1916
11	Pembroke II	Sto 1C	2 5 1916	29 5 1916
12	Pembroke II	Sto 1C	30 5 1916	26 6 1916
13				

During a video meeting with Becky, the SHTP2 Project Coordinator, she asked us to talk about 3 goals we felt we could achieve by the end of April. My goals were:

1. Learning more about the conservation of wood and other materials, building up knowledge on different techniques when it's appropriate to use them.

One of the projects I was about to begin at NMRN was conserving a figurehead that was part of the figurehead collection in the Victory Gallery. As this was going to be my first time treating painted wood, I wanted to use this time to gain more knowledge on how this is done. I've found a variety of texts, some which will provide me with a background to wood conservation in general, whilst others are more specific. The most helpful text I've found is on the conservation of wooden altarpieces; the book has collated articles detailing the methodology used in various unique projects working to conserve wooden altarpieces. As many of these are painted and feature a range of techniques and materials in their build, I feel like the methods used in these articles can definitely help me to decide what the best methodology for my own project will be.

2. Make significant progress with another Unit of the Historic Vessel Conservation (HVC) course

Victoria, the coordinator for the HVC course, has helpfully set up a meeting for us with Graham McKenzie, one of the Chief Engineers and Project Manager for SS Shieldhall. When I looked through some documents to review about SS Shieldhall I was struck by how organised they seemed to be in terms of managing the conservation of the vessel. Looking through the HVC Units, it became clear that the talk with Graham would be very helpful for writing the Unit 5 Assessments. Unit 5 of the HVC course focuses on Conservation Management Plans, and the assessment asks us to explain how they are written, their components, and why they matter. I read through the HVC book about conservation management plans, as well as the resources on Blackboard and was able to come up with 5 questions for Graham which should provide a valuable insight and aid the successful completion of the Unit 5 Assessment.

3. Finding and starting an online course in something to do with museum collections.

Thanks to the resource list, and the efforts of organisations, like the Museum Association, to organise online courses for the museum community, I've been able to enroll in two online courses which will provide a sound base for my future museum work:

Museum Essentials: Working with Collections

Course Objectives:

1. A greater understanding of how collections should be seen as dynamic
2. Competence to work in a participatory way with people using collections
3. Confidence to advocate for the use of collections in a braver more democratised way

Museums as a Site and Source of Learning

Course Objectives:

1. What do visitors want? How do we know?
 - a. How do we find out what different audiences want and how to engage them?
2. What's it all about? The Exhibition
 - a. The role of the curator and the way an exhibition is interpreted
3. Hard decisions for the conservator
 - a. Exploring the role of the conservator in the context of an exhibition

I've also found an app that allows me to better organise my days to ensure I am getting the most out of the resources available to me and making significant progress with the above goals. Microsoft To Do is a free app that allows you to write to do lists and plan different tasks, set reminders, and it can even link up to your email account to keep track of any upcoming video meetings. Every Friday one of my tasks is to write up a schedule for the next week, looking through the resources provided to in order to decide how to best focus my days. This way I can easily move from task to task throughout the day without having to spend time figuring out what I can do to break the day up a bit more.

With the wealth of resources available to me online I feel like I will be able to make this time stuck at home really worthwhile. I am continually grateful for opportunity this project has provided me to be able to expand on my knowledge and the continued support from the project organisers.