

CABINET

16 September 2009

TRANSFER OF OWNERSHIP OF THE MODEL OF HMS CONSTANTINE

REPORT OF HEAD OF ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL SERVICES

Contact Officer: Geoff Denford, Principal Curator Tel No: 01962 848 396, e-mail gdenford@winchester.gov.uk

RECENT REFERENCES:

None.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The model of HMS Constantine was made for Sir Francis Thornhill Baring in about 1850, and he later donated it to the City Museum.

The model has been on loan to the National Maritime Museum (NMM) in Greenwich since 1948. In May this year, the NMM wrote to request that ownership of the model be permanently transferred to them.

The model falls outside the collecting criteria detailed in the City Council's Collecting and Collections Management Policy, most recently updated and approved by Cabinet (CAB1130) in 2005. Members are asked to approve the transfer of the model to the NMM as part of an ongoing programme of review, rationalisation and dispersal of the museum collections.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Cabinet approves the transfer of ownership of the model of the HMS Constantine as a gift to the National Maritime Museum with immediate effect.

## CABINET

16 September 2009

### TRANSFER OF OWNERSHIP OF THE MODEL OF HMS CONSTANTINE

#### REPORT OF HEAD OF ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL SERVICES

#### DETAIL:

##### 1 Introduction

1.1 The model of HMS Constantine, a Vernon class frigate designed by Sir William Symonds, was made for Sir Francis Thornhill Baring in about 1850. He later donated it to the City Museum, and there is nothing in the museum records to suggest any kind of conditions on this donation. The model has been on loan to the National Maritime Museum (NMM), Greenwich, since 1948. The loan is reviewed and renewed by the NMM every three years in accordance with government indemnity requirements.

1.2 The NMM wrote in May this year to request that ownership of the model be transferred to them. The request was made on the basis that:

- a) the model would be a very strong candidate for inclusion in a new Sail to Steam/Victorian Navy gallery at the NMM, the original having been one of the last sailing frigates commissioned for the Navy and later converted to steam;
- b) the administrative costs and staff time involved in the regular renewal of loans are increasingly hard to accommodate at a time when resources in the museum are stretched;
- c) the NMM's current policy would be to return an object on long term loan where the lenders are unable to transfer it, and they would now like to make a firm decision about the model.

1.3 The model falls outside the collecting criteria detailed in the City Council's Collecting and Collections Management Policy, most recently updated and approved by Cabinet (CAB1130) in 2005. The policy provides guidelines for the disposal of such objects, and Members are asked to approve this permanent transfer in line with the provisions of that policy.

##### 2 Disposal Policy and Rationale

2.1 The Collecting and Collections Management Policy includes the following paragraphs, which are based on recommended best practice set out by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA). The MLA is the national

development agency working for and on behalf of museums, libraries and archives and advising government on policy and priorities for the sector.

*d. Decisions to dispose of items will not be made with the principal aim of generating funds.*

*e. Any monies received by the museum governing body from the disposal of items will be applied for the benefit of the collections. This normally means the purchase of further acquisitions but in exceptional cases improvements relating to the care of collections may be justifiable. Advice on these cases will be sought from MLA.*

*f. A decision to dispose of a specimen or object, whether by gift, exchange, sale or destruction (in the case of an item too badly damaged or deteriorated to be of any use for the purposes of the collections), will be the responsibility of the governing body of the museum acting on the advice of professional curatorial staff, if any, and not of the curator of the collection acting alone.*

*g. Once a decision to dispose of material in the collection has been taken, priority will be given to retaining it within the public domain, unless it is to be destroyed. It will therefore be offered in the first instance, by gift, exchange or sale, directly to other Accredited Museums likely to be interested in its acquisition.*

- 2.2 The Museums Service has been pursuing dispersals options in recent years in an effort to contain storage requirements for the reserve collections and to make space for new acquisitions arising – for example – from archaeological digs forming part of large-scale developments such as Silver Hill. Dispersals work so far has focused on archaeological deposits (CAB 1323, Museums Dispersals Policy, from October 2006 refers).
- 2.3 The NMM has indicated that should we decide not to donate the model to them then they will return it to us. It would not be an appropriate item to display permanently in our museums, the focus of which is the history of Winchester. The model would therefore present the Museums Service with a storage problem as the model is of a significant size (2m long, 0.71m wide and 1.4m high). Moreover, the model would no longer be seen regularly by the public as is currently the case while it is on display at one of the country's national museums. The NMM is currently planning a new Victorian gallery which would give additional prominence to the model because of its importance in representing the evolution of ships from wind- to engine-driven.
- 2.4 Winchester's Museums Service is well regarded within the museums world and underpinning its reputation is its official 'accredited' status with the MLA. Sale of the model to anything but an accredited museum (see para g above) would prejudice its accredited status. In practice, however, few museums would be able to pay the valuation price of £65,000 and few would have the obvious interest in the model shown by the NMM. Southampton City Council's museums service has been informed about the model to assess whether there is potential for keeping it on display more

locally, but they have not expressed any desire to acquire it. Moreover, the original ship (as opposed to the model) was built in Pembroke Dock and served its life on the South America station so there are no known links with Southampton in that respect.

- 2.5 The recommendation is therefore to offer it, by gift, to the NMM, which is an accredited museum. Should it be relevant to any future exhibition mounted by the Council's curatorial team or any other museum, there is no reason to believe that the NMM would not make the model available on a short term loan which – equally – is considered best practice for the designated national museums.
- 2.6 Members are asked to approve the transfer of the model with immediate effect, on this basis.

#### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

#### 3 SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND CORPORATE BUSINESS PLAN (RELEVANCE TO):

- 3.1 The transfer of the model as outlined above supports the 'efficient and effective Council' outcome of our corporate strategy. It ensures the best possible care for and interpretation of the model in a nationally designated museum. It also reduces the administration required to facilitate loan renewals every three years.
- 3.2 In addition, the transfer will support the 'health and wellbeing' outcome by ensuring high levels of public access to the model on a long term basis.

#### 4 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 4.1 The model has been valued at £65,000. It is unlikely, however, that the Council could ever realise this asset in view of its Collecting Policy: it has chosen to loan the model for 61 years to another museum and this would potentially have continued indefinitely had the NMM not requested the transfer.
- 4.2 The Council would not receive any payment in respect of the transfer, but if it were to receive payment from another museum or organisation it would – based on its own adopted Collecting Policy – be expected to re-invest any such receipt into its Museums Service.
- 4.3 It should be noted that all future costs in respect of conservation, storage, insurance and display would be met by the NMM whereas they would devolve to the City Council if the model were returned.
- 4.4 There is no impact of this disposal on the Council's Balance Sheet or Income and Expenditure Account as the carrying value is nil.

## 5 RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- 5.1 The local media has recently demonstrated the level of public interest in Southampton City Council's proposed commercial disposal of two of its own works of art, although it is proposing to reinvest these receipts in an ambitious new museum project.
- 5.2 There is clearly potential for damage to the Council's reputation if the transfer is considered to be inappropriate by local residents and stakeholders, or if officers do not follow the Collecting Policy which has been formally adopted by Cabinet. However, there is sound logic in the proposed transfer, and proper procedures are being followed.

### BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

Revised Collecting and Collections Management Policy -  
<http://www.winchester.gov.uk/Documents/Museums/Collections%20Management%20Policy%20%2805%20rev.%29.doc>

APPENDICES: None