

# Researching Your Items: Identifying Ships Hardware

This guide sheet provides information on how to research or find out more information about items you hold.

The National Museum of the Royal Navy is unfortunately unable to value or research items held in your possession for ethical reasons. However, we hope this guide will provide you with some helpful tips on how to undertake your own research and find out more.

## Valuation

Valuations of items can be very subjective and are open to market value interpretation. There is also a difference in whether something is valued for sale or insurance purposes. The best way to get a value is to approach a relevant auctioneer and get their expert advice. You can also gain a basic idea of value by finding similar items which have sold in the last few years. Sources to check include reviewing past auction catalogues or sites.

## Identifying Possible Ships Hardware

Identifying ships hardware can be easy or difficult depending on the object in question and how much information you can obtain from it. You first need to determine what you know about the object. Consider the following points:

- Do you broadly recognize what it is? E.g. a radio, or an anchor.  
If 'yes' you can target your research further.  
If 'no' it will make research more difficult, but not necessarily mean the end of the road. Consider: does it look complete or like it is only a part of something?
- Think about provenance:  
Do you know where the object has come from? Where did you get it from? If you obtained it from somebody else, do they know more about its history?  
Can you find the name of the ship on it? If so, you can target your research to what would have been on that specific ship, or class of ships.

Be aware: not everything bearing a ship's name may have originated from it. Lots of memorabilia may have been created over the years bearing the same name. Similarly, ship names are often re-used and there may be multiple ships bearing the same name.

- Do you know which era it came from? If so, you can focus your research on different ships from that period.
- Visible markings  
Key bits of information you may be able to find include:
  - serial number(s)
  - product name
  - maker's name
  - date



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This information may lead you to an answer straight away by simply typing one or two of them into a search engine.

- Dimensions: If you have dimensions you can use them to help confirm a theory by comparing it to a known example of a similar object.

Once you have established any of the above, take your search online. Using search engines is a great place to start, and there are a number of museum catalogues available to view online, including our own. Use these as a research resource, there may be a catalogue entry that matches your object, or there may be a resource available (such as ships diagrams, Books of Regulation, Instruction Manuals, etc.) that could help further. You may even find something similar for sale online, either through sites like Ebay, or through auction websites; these listings, particularly on auction websites, will often include more information. There is also a chance somebody has already researched a similar object online, so don't be afraid to wade through internet forum posts as there may be some useful information there.

Sadly, it is not always possible to identify objects if very little is known about them and they have lost their provenance; if you have exhausted all of the above avenues, it may be time to stop. This is always disappointing, but the issue arises from the already lost provenance, and you should be satisfied that you have tried everything you can.

**BE AWARE:** items from ships can be hazardous. For instance, dials may contain radioactive materials, electrical equipment may contain asbestos, if there is paint on a surface it may be lead-based, etc. So, make sure you are aware before handling it and talk to an expert if you are concerned.

## Below are some further sources and organisations to help you:

1. National Museum of the Royal Navy: <https://collections.nmrn.org.uk/search/simple>
2. Royal Museums Greenwich: <https://www.rmg.co.uk/collections>
3. Chatham Historic Dockyard: [https://collection.thedockyard.co.uk/discover-the-collection?\\_ga=2.77544790.257476036.1676636331-1026213132.1664958168](https://collection.thedockyard.co.uk/discover-the-collection?_ga=2.77544790.257476036.1676636331-1026213132.1664958168)
4. Science Museum Group: <https://collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/>