

Researching Your Items: Identifying People & Ships

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 People, Locations and Ships in Images

Identifying individuals in photographs or artworks can be very difficult. Where possible, try to find anyone living who might be able to recognise them. Alternatively, locate similar photographs to see if the person(s) have been previously identified. You could try using an online recognition service such as Google Lens (<https://lens.google/>) or TinEye (<https://tineye.com/>) to help with this. The same approach can be used when trying to identify buildings or locations.

The first step when trying to identify a ship in photographs or artwork is to see if there are any recognisable features. If it is an older ship, look at the size of the vessel; the number of masts and sails it has, as well as how they have been arranged. When considering later ships think about the following to help narrow down your search:

- Is there a pennant number on the side of the ship? This will be made up of a letter followed by numbers e.g., HMS Queen Elizabeth's pennant number is R08.



- Is there a ship's badge on the funnel or gun tompions? These will usually consist of a picture and the name of the ship.
- What time-period do you think the ship might be from? This combined with the size and location of the ship might help to identify it.
- Can you identify the location of the picture? Some ships served at particular places for a length of time e.g., the Mediterranean Station.

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- What shape is the ship? If it is large, with an angled flight deck, steam catapult, or a ramp/ski-jump, it might be an aircraft carrier. If it is smaller, it might be a frigate or a minesweeper.
- How many guns can you see? The larger and more powerful the ship, the more guns it will have.

Below are some further sources and organisations to help you:

1. *Jane's War at Sea 1897-1997: 100 Years of Jane's Fighting Ships*, published by Harper Collins, 1997
2. *British Warship Recognition: The Perkins Identification Albums*, re-published by Seaforth Publishing, 2017
3. *Aircraft Carriers* by Bernard Ireland, 2010
4. *British Aircraft Carriers: Design, Development & Service Histories* by David Hobbs, 2014
5. *A Century of Carrier Aviation: The Evolution of Ships and Shipborne Aircraft* by David Hobbs, 2009
6. *Pendant Numbers of the Royal Navy: A Record of the Allocation of Pendant Numbers to Royal Navy Warships and Auxiliaries*, published by Steve Bush and Ben Warlow, 2021
7. *Royal Navy Ship's Badges*, published by Peter C. Smith, 1974
8. Royal Museums Greenwich: <https://www.rmg.co.uk/collections>
9. Imperial War Museums: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/>