

Researching Your Items: Identifying Artists

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 Artists

When trying to identify the artist of your painting start by looking for a signature or monogram of initials – paintings are often signed in the bottom corners of the front of the canvas or even on the reverse of the work. Some artists chose not to sign their works or hide their signature or monogram within the actual content of the work.



Signed by the artist lower left:
W G R Masters/54
(Lt Col William Godfrey Rayson
Masters RMLI c.1824-1895/RMM
2006/272b)



Signed by the artist lower right corner:
Charles Dixon/93 (Charles Edward Dixon RI (1872-
1934/NMRN 2023/13)



This portrait (RNM 1986/571) of naval chaplain, Arthur Price Hill, painted in Vienna in 1913 was by an unknown artist until work by Art Detective (<https://www.artuk.org/artdetective/>) correctly identified the monogram in the top right corner as that of the Austrian artist, Tom von Dreger (1868-1948).

Note: Artists can change how they sign a work depending upon the stage of their career.

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Additional assistance:

- Online resources such as TinEye (<https://tineye.com/>) or Google Lens (<https://lens.google/>) may be able to match your artwork to the thousands viewable online. A jpg digital image of the image and frame uploaded into a search bar will enable an online search for your image and the artist. Other image recognition apps exist as do research image searches such as Smartify (<https://smartify.org/>).
- Look through auction indexes (via auction house websites) for past auctions as well as collections inventories. The British Museum (<https://www.britishmuseum.org/our-work/departments/prints-and-drawings>) and the Royal Collections Trust (<https://www.rct.uk/collection/search#/page/1>) are two good examples of online collections.
- Once an artist has been successfully identified, you can use biographical dictionaries or web searches to ascertain whether your painting has any outstanding intellectual property rights against it. An artist's work remains in copyright until 70 years after their date of death. For example, the noted marine artist William Lionel Wyllie died in 1931 so his works remained in copyright until after 31 December 2001.

Below are some further sources and organisations to help you:

1. Christie's Auction House: <https://www.christies.com/features/7-things-to-know-about-artist-signatures-8365-1.aspx>
2. Acrylgiessen Painting Forum: <https://acrylgiessen.com/en/find-an-artist-by-name/>
3. Wikipedia: <https://www.wikihow.com/Identify-a-Painting>
4. Painting and Artists Forum: <https://www.paintingandartists.com/how-to-find-out-who-painted-a-picture-thanks-to-google-images>