

## london selection

# Clear and steady course

■ Precise cataloguing and careful pricing help navigate an increasingly polarised market



**Ivan Macquisten** reports

**MOVING home is always a stressful business, and moving business premises... well that's another story.**

**Happily for Charles Miller, formerly co-resident at Blythe Road with fellow specialists Thomas Del Mar (arms and armour) and Matthew Barton (silver), his new arrangements bring him the best of both worlds.**

The need for more space meant a move to nearby Imperial Road when it came to administration and storage, but continuing good relations with his former cohorts means that Blythe Road, just next to Olympia, remains the venue for his sales.

The first of Mr Miller's biannual Maritime and Scientific Models, Instruments & Art sales for 2012, on April 25, was also his first opportunity to test the logistics of his new set-up.

His verdict? "We did Wednesday to Wednesday, moving everything to Blythe Road, the view, four hours on the rostrum and everything back in Imperial Road by 7.10 the same night. There were one or two interesting moments when it came to transferring the IT, but overall, we're very happy with the new arrangements."

The real ongoing challenge to his sector of the business, he says, is sourcing the right items for sale.

"The market has pretty much polarised between the rare and unusual on one hand and the stock-in-trade on the other, where you have to work much harder to move things and everything has to be just right." There's the further challenge of trade buyers wanting untouched rarities, while private buyers demand pieces in tip-top 'gallery' condition.



**Left:** 5½in (14cm) long scrimshaw whale's tooth by Edward Burdett – £8000.

With all this in mind, cataloguing has to be spot on and Mr Miller's cautious but direct approach paid off on a number of occasions here – buyers like to know where they stand.

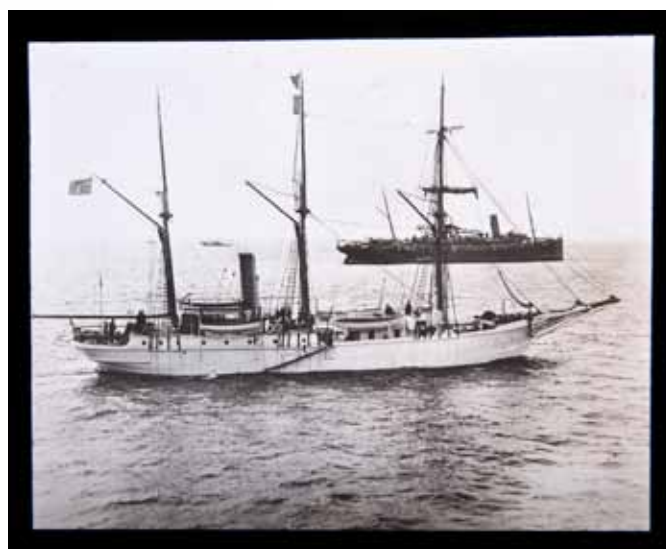
Take, for instance, lot 17, one of a small but select five-lot Travel & Exploration section. A fairly plain-looking 18th century pocket compass, it would probably have been worth no more than a few hundred pounds had the inside of the lid not been inscribed *Sir Joseph Banks Compass use [sic] by him on Captain Cooks voyages.*

The problem here was that although clearly the right date and highly plausible, there was no documentation to back up the inscription. Mr Miller told the vendor that the right thing to do in the circumstances was to value it as a simple compass of the period, put it on view and let bidders make up their own minds. And they certainly did. One of the most viewed lots in the sale, it left its £200-400 estimate way behind, taking £3800 from a private buyer underbid by two museums.

Such caution also explained what, at first, seemed like a pretty conservative estimate of £1000-1500 on another lot in this section, a magic lantern, storage boxes, lecture notes and archive of close to 400 maritime and exploration slides, including 86 relating to Shackleton's *Endurance* expedition.

What marked this lot out for special consideration was another inscription, this time

**Right:** magic lantern, storage boxes, lecture notes and archive of close to 400 maritime and exploration slides, including 86 relating to Shackleton's *Endurance* expedition – £7500.



inside the lid of one of the boxes, which read: *COMMANDER WORSLEY RNI 6 GLEDSTANES Road LONDON W.14.*

Frank Worsley (1872-1943) was a New Zealand-born sailor and explorer and part of Shackleton's *Endurance* team. More importantly, he was one of the five hand-picked crew of the open boat that undertook the perilous but eventually successful rescue journey to South Georgia.

The magic lantern and slides, therefore, were most probably the very ones that Worsley is reputed to have used in lectures on his return to London. Again, Mr Miller approached the provenance with due care and attention, noting that, inscription and persuasive evidence aside, there was an element of hearsay to the provenance. His frankness paid off once more with a

**Left:** 1:24 scale builder's model of the twin-masted racing schooner *Aline* by Camper & Nicholson 1860, later owned by HRH Edward Prince of Wales (1882-1895) – £20,000.

**Below:** detail of a dockyard builder's model for the steamships *Putney Hill* and *Tower Grange* – £13,000.



bid of £7500 from a French private buyer.

The final lot in the section, an early 19th century Royal Naval officer's album

of views of the Mediterranean, could hardly be called a sketchbook in light of the detail, draughtsmanship and finish. It was, nonetheless, a difficult object to price as the views were not coloured.

**Charles Miller Ltd, April 25**  
Number of lots offered: 278  
Lots sold: 80%  
Buyer's Premium: 20%  
**Sale total: £351,066**

Lots sold to internet: 33 (12%)  
Value sold to internet: £21,370 (6%)  
Bidders registered to internet: 64

# in choppy waters

**Right:** Napoleonic prisoner-of-war-style bone and baleen model of *HMS Argo* – £18,000.



**"While items such as mounted half-block models failed to stir enthusiasm and accounted for a number of buy-ins, anything of true craftsmanship and loving attention to detail drew interest"**

A trade entry with a tempting estimate of £1500-2000, it was another well-viewed lot, offering nearly 50 very early views of interesting locations such as the Corfu Citadel. Slightly disbound, the potential from breaking up this album must have been clear, and it ended as a trade buy at £6000.

As ever, the real stars of the show remained the ships' models.

While items such as mounted half-block models failed to stir enthusiasm and accounted for a number of buy-ins, anything of true craftsmanship and loving attention to detail drew interest.

Once again, Napoleonic prisoner-of-war-style models in bone and baleen stood out. A finely planked model of *HMS Argo*, fully rigged and complete with a wealth of detail, from brass guns to chicken coops, measured 20½ x 23in (52 x 58cm). There was some restoration, but it shined quality and easily topped its

£10,000-15,000 estimate to take £18,000 from a European private buyer. "If it had been completely original, we would have

doubled the price," said Mr Miller.

An "extraordinary level of interest" helped a small, 8½ x 8½ x 3¼in (21.5 x 21 x 8cm) Napoleonic POW bone and baleen model of a 100-gun first rate ship of the line to £3800 against hopes of £1500-2500, while a similar but larger, at 12 x 15in (30 x 38cm), model of the third-rate ship of the line *Warrior* was guided at £1500-2000 but took £3500.

That said, Napoleonic models made of wood did not fare as well, notably the 13¼ x 16½in (33 x 42cm) polychrome 80-gun ship mounted on a painted display base, which was bought in against an estimate of £4000-6000 but went as an after-sale to a US institution.

Later models included the sale's top lot, a 1:24 scale builder's model of the twin-masted racing schooner *Aline* by Camper & Nicholson 1860, later owned by HRH Edward Prince of Wales (1882-95).

"Very historic and very rare," was Mr Miller's view of it, but he felt that the low-estimate £20,000 it fetched from a UK collector reflected one or two concerns over details of its restoration.

A dockyard builder's model for the steamships *Putney Hill* and *Tower Grange*, by Doxford & Sons Ltd, carried a plaque with a release date for 1940, but showed all the signs of being a pre-War build with the range of materials and intricate detail (post-War models tend to sport painted fittings, for instance).

At somewhere not far short of 5ft in length, the pair passed their £8000-10,000 estimate to take £13,000, while the following lot, a builder's model of the

coastal cargo ship *Sverige*, dating to 1871, complete with a full suit of stitched linen sails and consigned by a Swedish shipping company, sold to a Dublin buyer at £7000 against a £3000-5000 guide.

Finally, two scale models made and consigned by amateur modeller E Dyke, who is moving and downsizing, went to overseas museums, each at a double-low-estimate £1400. The first was of the Heavy Cruiser *HMS London* as configured for the China Station in 1947, while the second was of the light fleet aircraft carrier *Vengeance* (1944).

"Dyke certainly has a following; we are unlikely to see more models from him for the time being and these were properly carved and etched models, very nicely detailed and with great character," said Mr Miller.

Several dozen lots of naval and Nelson memorabilia, headlined by the collection of Greenwich dealer Warwick Leadley, offered more standard fare. Here commemorative mugs and jugs rubbed shoulders with pictures, documents, medals and ephemera, all keenly priced and much of it running around estimate.

There were highlights, however, including a 9in (23cm) high, undated commemorative glass rummer with a bust-length portrait of Nelson, which went to a private buyer at £850, and an unusually strong performance from a period newspaper giving a full and authentic account of the death of Nelson. Two tied bids here on the book took it comfortably past double its £600 top estimate and it sold to a European private buyer at £1500.

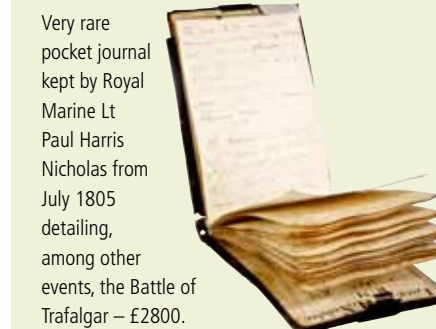
A step up from all this was lot 58, a very rare pocket journal kept by a Royal Marine from July 1805. Several things added to its allure. Firstly, it was unusual as a marine rather than a naval account and came direct from the family, having been kept in a garage. Secondly, the 60 neatly written sides noted in detail various actions and events, wounded men, transfers and the death of Nelson, with around a quarter of the pages giving a vivid description of Trafalgar, including a valued, if faded, plan of the battle.

What took this lot beyond its £800-1200 guide to £2800, however, was the identity of the diarist, Lt Paul Harris Nicholas, a marine on the ship *Belleisle*, a good artist and well known in his day. His brother, Sir N.H. Nicholas GCMG, compiled a monumental work publishing all of Nelson's extant letters and despatches.

The top lot in this section was a real rarity: a late 19th/early 20th century photographic archive of around 170 views pertaining to early Royal Navy submarine



18th century pocket compass, inscribed *Sir Joseph Banks Compass use [sic] by him on Captain Cooks voyages* – £3800.



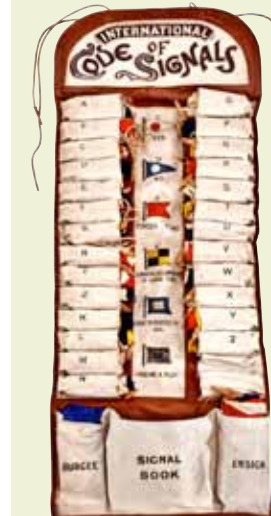
Very rare pocket journal kept by Royal Marine Lt Paul Harris Nicholas from July 1805 detailing, among other events, the Battle of Trafalgar – £2800.



Scrimshaw whalebone pick-wick – £1600.



c.1910 fine silver-plated steam yacht bulkhead oil lamp by William McGeoch & Co of Glasgow and Birmingham, standing 16in (41cm) high and appearing unused – £3000.



Rolled set of yachting signal flags c.1902 – £800.



Rare ivory Nuremberg dial, signed and dated by Johann Gebhart for 1550 – £5500.

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# london selection

charles miller sale

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development. Here it was the man who had collated the archive who made the difference. Captain John Alfred Moreton (1877-1920) was the protégé of Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon, who commanded the first submarine flotilla from 1902-06, when he left to take command of *Dreadnought*, taking Moreton with him as First Lieutenant. Moreton's association with submarines came to an end in 1909 when he was appointed commander of *HMS Duncan*, allowing much of the archive, where he is shown with submarines, to be dated before this.

Bacon is also shown, as is *Dreadnought*, with the archive seemingly covering the years 1895-1910. No surprise then that this was an institutional buy at a double-top-estimate £6000. Could its new home be the Royal Navy Submarine Museum in Gosport?

Sailor art is proving an increasingly tricky sphere because of the tightening rules on ivory. US buyers, who have been leading players, find themselves baffled by much of the regulation Stateside – seizures of centuries-old scrimshaw are not unknown. "It's already affecting the market," Mr Miller told *ATG*.

Pre-eminent was a rare 19th century scrimshaw whale's tooth by the short-lived and much sought-after Edward Burdett (1805-33). At 5½in (14cm) long, it was finely incised over both sides with ships named as *HMS Sealark* and *HMS Isis*, both in full sail amid Burdett's typically woven sea. Taking a top-estimate £8000 from a US collector, Mr Miller felt that without the added pressures of confusion over market regulations, it is the sort of piece that might well have made more.

Rarity also brought decent prices for a 19th century scrimshaw whale's tooth pipe at £3000, a scrimshaw whalebone pick-wick at £1600 and a whale's tooth snuff mull at £650. However, other pieces in the section enjoyed a mixed fate and there were a number of failures.

With the centenary of the *Titanic* disaster only ten days before the sale, a modest offering of associated material here held up well, led by silver (£6500) and bronze (£4000) *Carpathia* medals awarded for the rescue of survivors. A discharge certificate for 2nd Class Smoke Room steward James Witter took £1800 against an estimate of £1000-1500.



**Above:** 18th century Italian silver ring dial, incised internally with hours and externally with months, measuring 1in (2.5cm) in diameter – £1800.



Decorative appeal can be important in boosting prices for marine fittings and collectables, a point illustrated by a number of pieces here. A c.1910 fine silver-plated steam yacht bulkhead oil lamp by William McGeoch & Co of Glasgow and Birmingham, standing 16in (41cm) high, seemed unused and came direct from the McGeoch family. At £3000, it more than trebled its top estimate and is destined for the steam yacht of its new owner, who also paid a top-estimate £800 for an attractive rolled set of yachting signal flags c.1902.

Meanwhile, a private European buyer claimed a pair of nickel-plated and enamel international code signal plates by Benzie for Cowes, for the K class racing yacht *Moonbeam* (1920). Against a £300-500 guide, they took £1100. The same buyer also paid more than twice the top estimate at £420 for a quantity of navigation teaching aides, which were as decorative as many pieces of folk art.

At £1500, a 19th century wood and metal lighthouse-form clock, standing 17in (43cm) high, was another attractive piece, selling above top estimate to a UK private buyer.

Instruments provided around a quarter of the lots in the sale and a number of highlights.

A rare ivory Nuremberg dial, signed and dated by Johann Gebhart for 1550, showed some shrinkage and wear and was missing a string and two pin gnomons, but was in good condition for its age nonetheless and went above its £3000-4000 estimate to take £5500 from a German private buyer. An 18th century



**Above:** one of around 170 views linked to early Royal Navy submarine development in a late 19th/early 20th century photographic archive collated by Captain John Alfred Moreton (1877-1920), the protégé of Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon, who commanded the first submarine flotilla from 1902-06 – £6000.

**Left:** 19th century wood and metal lighthouse-form clock, standing 17in (43cm) high – £1500.

Italian silver ring dial, incised internally with hours and externally with months, measured only 1in (2.5cm) in diameter, but again showed decorative appeal. It had a guide of £400-600 but took £1800 from the same European private buyer who had been active among the fittings and collectables.

Two noon-day cannon dials also did well. The better of the two, a 1789 example by Joly of Lille, with 4-bore cannon, standing 4ft (1.22m) on a marble base and column, hit the bottom end of its £8000-12,000 estimate, while the other, 19th century and also French but without the column, came in at £2300 against a £1000-1500 estimate.

A rare Hamilton Model 221 4-orbit, two-day marine chronometer dated to 1944 was one of only 12 made and went at £5500 to a private buyer from the Isle of Man.

Pick of the instruments, though, was a fine, complete and fresh-to-market, signed, lacquered brass botanical microscope and accessories by Andrew Pritchard c.1840. Accompanied by a copy of Pritchard's *History of Infusoria*, 1862 and two sides of original manuscript instructions, thought to be in Pritchard's own hand, at least one interested dealer said that they had never seen an example that had the wooden arm rest for steadying the hands intact. Little wonder, then, when it left its £2000-4000 estimate behind to take

£11,000 from a North American buyer.

Hopes of £1200-1800 for an early 19th century ivory pocket compass by Gilbert of London were unrealised, and Mr Miller thought that the casing might have been earlier than the insert.

The big hope among the pictures was John Scott's (fl.1844-66) choppy oil-on-canvas seascape showing *The French steamer Paris off the mouth of the Tyne bound for Hamburg*. It had many of the elements of sought-after pictures of this type and Mr Miller considered it to be among the best Scott works he had seen. Despite all this, the picture looked overcleaned and had been relined and it was bought in without a bid against an estimate of £7000-9000.

That left £4800 as the top picture, an unusual War of Independence view of the Hudson River. Estimated at £2000-3000, the 2ft 4in x 3ft 10in (71cm x 1.17m) oil on canvas, *The Tartar, Roebuck and Phoenix forcing the passage of the Hudson River, July 1776*, had come from a private house in Norfolk, where it had been for 50 years and had clearly spent some time above a fireplace. However, although the cloudscape was not in the finest condition, the ships depicted had fared better and it sold to the UK trade.



**Right:** a quantity of navigation teaching aides – £420.