



# Breezy day off port of Plymouth painted by little-known son of city

A marine painting by a forgotten artist is to be sold, reports **Sarah Pitt**

A marine painting by a little-known 19th century artist who lived in poverty in Plymouth is going under the hammer in a Westcountry auction house next week.

The oil painting by William Gibbons, *March Day Off Plymouth*, is being sold at auction at Lawrences auctioneers in Crewkerne, Somerset, on Friday.

"It is a nice bracing marine picture," said Richard Kay, paintings expert at Lawrences.

William Gibbons lived in Plymouth and painted the seascapes off Plymouth Sound and the Hoe. He had a relatively short life, dying aged 45 in 1886, and his work languished in obscurity until fairly recently.

But dealer Robin Small, who has put the painting into the auction, believes Gibbons' work has been vastly underrated.

Robin, who named his company William Gibbons Fine Art after the artist, says the 1876 painting – 22.5cm by 18cm and signed by the artist – showed the painter's skill at capturing a breezy day at sea.

"I think he has great powers of observation," he says. "He is good at capturing the movement of the sea, which is always tricky."

"You can spot a bad marine painting, because often the waves look too harsh."

He said that the painting, estimated to fetch £350-£450, also shows the artist's skill at painting figures of



William Gibbons was a marine artist who lived in Plymouth during the 19th century. His paintings are being rediscovered, and include this study of the Eddystone Lighthouse off Plymouth on a stormy day, auctioned some time ago by Plymouth Auction Rooms

**'Gibbons is good at capturing the movement of the sea, which is always tricky'**

people, in the men in the boat in the foreground.

"This one is particularly fine," he says. "Very often second-rate painters can't paint people very well, but here we have got these three chaps in the pilot cutter, the little boat in the foreground, and they are very well observed."

He said he had put the painting into a Westcountry auction in the hope that a local art gallery might be interested – there are several Williams Gibbons paintings in the collection at Plymouth Museum and Art Gallery.

Robin explained: "We named our company after him because what we specialise in is neglected artists who we think should be reevaluated."

*March Day off Plymouth* is up for auction on Friday, October 12, at Lawrences, South Street, Crewkerne, TA18 8AB.

## Observational skills give a refreshing new take on the everyday of seaside life

### THE ART ROOM, TOPSHAM

The paintings of Robert Organ are as refreshing as the sea breezes that blow through them.

It is no surprise that the artist's new paintings are made from his immediate surroundings in Penzance, for it has ever been his practice to respond to what he sees daily around him.

An exhibition of his latest work, *A Year In Penzance*, is at The Art Room in Topsham from tomorrow until November 4.

Here the viewer can enjoy his keen observational skills and ability to capture scenes of daily life in a refreshingly engaging style.

His new works reflect a preoccupation with the groups and movements of people in the glittering space of the seafront, the fluttering pennants above the promenade, and the street lamps complicating the natural light.

Organ offers us not a representational fait-accompli, but an experience which challenges our looking and our thinking.



Detail of one of Robert Organ's new paintings



The silver Apostle spoon, dating from the 1600s, which was made in Barnstaple, above, and, inset, figure of St Peter on the handle and the maker's mark on the back. Other lots being auctioned next week include, from far left, a Magic Lamp by Alan Davie, a bronze Japanese pikeman, and a walnut seaweed marquetry longcase clock



## Rare silver christening gift survived the Civil War

### LAWRENCES, CREWKERNE

A fine silver Apostle spoon made in Barnstaple when Charles I was on the throne and the town was a bustling port has surfaced at Somerset auction house Lawrences, writes *Sarah Pitt*.

Auction house silver expert Alex Butcher said he was excited by the rare lot, which might well have been given as a gift at a child's christening, nearly 400 years ago.

The spoon features a gilt figure of St Peter, one of Christ's apostles, on the end of its handle, and is in excellent condition given its age. It has a guide price of £1,700 to £2,000, and will be auctioned by Lawrences next Tuesday.

It is the maker's mark on the back of the spoon's stem which links it to the North Devon port – it is believed to be that of Robert Mathew of Barnstaple, who was making silverware in the town in the 1630s.

"Apostle spoons were christening presents and sometimes they were also given for weddings," said Alex. "A family might also have a set of 12 apostles plus Christ, but you will only find them singly now."

"Often we don't really now the story behind them, but Barnstaple was quite a busy port in terms of shipping in the early 17th century, and there were lots of wealthy merchants in the town, so that gave rise to quite a few little silversmithing centres."

"Apostle spoons are very collectable and quite scarce, particularly when you get to the pre-Civil War period."

Many valuables disappeared in the turmoil of Civil War in the 1640s, but spoons sometimes survived, said Alex, because they could be easily secreted in a pocket or among papers.

There are a number of silver spoons from the 1630s up for auction

on Tuesday at the Crewkerne auction house, all part of a private collection. The Apostle spoon from Barnstaple is a particularly special piece. "It is a very well-made spoon, and would have been made for someone with quite a lot of money at the time," said Alex. He said the spoon could easily fetch as much as £3,000.

While Apostle spoons rarely come up in auctions, he said they did sell a Barnstaple spoon, "a very good one", about six months ago for £13,000. "It was engraved all over and made of silver gilt, and as made by John and Peter Quick, who had a workshop in the town and made fabulous-quality things."

He added: "It was interesting that there was a demand to these kinds of things, because most of the population were struggling."

Lawrences' silver auction takes place on Tuesday with further auctions from Wednesday to Friday. Visit [www.lawrences.co.uk](http://www.lawrences.co.uk).



## Ship's bell from HMS Boyne will draw keen bidding

### CHARLES MILLER LTD, LONDON

The bell from the River Class destroyer HMS Boyne, 1905, discovered off the Cornish coast, carries an estimate of £1,000 to £1,500.

Featuring in Charles Miller Ltd's maritime memorabilia auction on October 31, the bell was recovered by a man living in Hartley, Plymouth.


It has a moulded rim and shoulder, and is inscribed 'H.M.S. Boyne 1905.' There is an associated clapper and knot-work pull.

The businessman, whose hobby was diving, found the bell buried in the sand during a dive in 1988 in the Rame Head area. After dislodging it, he took all 35lb of it back to the surface using lifting bags.

He received a letter from the Ministry of Defence giving him permission to keep it – and this letter is also included in the lot.

The vendor, who now lives in France, lived in Plymouth for 25 years. He kept the bell on his office floor as it was too heavy to put anywhere else!

Contact Charles Miller Ltd, London for more information on 0207 806 5530. The sale is on October 31 at 25 Blythe Road, London W14 0PD.



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William Gibbons' oil painting 'March Day off Plymouth', above, will go under the hammer at Lawrences, Crewkerne, on Friday

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