Ships Portraits by WIlliam Mackensie Thompson

Sold

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REF: 83504

Height: 47 cm (18.5")

Width: 61 cm (24")

Depth: 3.5 cm (1.4")

Description

A group of nine portraits of Royal Navy Ships painted in water colour on paper.

The naval ships have not been painted individually and then mounted together for framing but have all been purposely done on one sheet of paper. Each ship has a frame painted around it to separate it from the others and is named and dated. It is highly probable that the painting was owned by Captain Guy Ouchterlony Twiss.

Research confirms that he joined each ship on the date given by the artist. The only ships we have not confirmed he was on are HMS Comus and Dauntless but the lack of information for this early part of his career are explained by the fact that he was still a Naval Cadet or Mate. Twiss was 14 when his appointment to HMS Pilot was announced in 1848. He made Mate in 1854 and Lieutenant in 1856 when he joined HMS Pique in the East Indies and China Station. In 1859 he joined Neptune followed by Royal Oak in 1863, both in the Mediterranean. In 1866 he became Commander on HMS Royal Alfred at Portsmouth before joining Warrior a year later in the Channel Squadron. In 1870 he became Commander of a drill ship, HMS Eagle at Liverpool. Five years later he was on HMS Hibernia at Malta. He was promoted to Captain on the last day of 1876. In 1879 he was stationed in Durban as the Principal Naval Transport Officer charged with organising the great influx of men and supplies from the numerous transport ships that arrived with reinforcements for the Anglo-Zulu War. He was then moved north up the coast to Port Dunford to do a similar job. He was appointed Captain of HMS Serapis on the 30th of December 1879, which explains the date of 1880 to the painting. Twiss' final ship was HMS Belleisle in 1885. In 1891 he was promoted to Rear Admiral on the Retired List and then Vice Admiral six years later.

The picture is signed 'W M Thomson Marine Artist' to the bottom lefthand corner by HMS Royal Oak. It is likely that Twiss or perhaps his fellow officers, commissioned the painting from William Mackenzie Thomson to mark the end of his career. Presumably not all of the ships Twiss served on are illustrated because there were simply too many. Perhaps Twiss chose the ones that marked a significant point in his career, or he had fond memories of, we can only guess. Not much is known of Thomson but he appears to have been a busy marine artist making a living from his ship's portraits. A number of his paintings of individual ships are known and some other group portraits but all with less ships than this example. It is believed he was born in 1840 and died in 1905.

The portraits are well painted and are interesting for the range of ships they illustrate from wooden sloops to armoured frigates. There is a sight crease running from top to bottom of the paper to the middle. A second shorter crease runs parallel to it from the top but only for the height of the first row of portraits. The picture has a rosewood veneered frame with a gilt slip that looks to be replaced. The individual portraits have a width of either 6 or 4 inches (15 - 10cm). The framed size is given. Circa 1890.

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