

£5 charity shop find makes auction waves

A piece of maritime memorabilia sold at Sworders for almost £5,000 after being bought for a fiver. **Sinead Corr** reports

A £5 charity shop bargain which turned out to be a rare piece of maritime memorabilia sold at auction in Stansted for £4,750.

The unassuming playbill bought in Epping was a theatrical advertisement printed aboard HMS Resolute during its Arctic expedition in the 1850s.

The bargain hunter took a liking to the framed piece after seeing another shopper inspect it and put it down. Thinking that the silk looked to have some age and intrigued by its charm, they performed some of their own research and found a similar example sold at Christie's in 2004 for over £2,000. Excited by its prospects, they took it to Sworders Fine Art Auctioneers in Stansted to be offered for sale.

The playbill, advertising performances of Shakespeare's *Taming the Shrew* and *The Two*

Bonnycastles, is a fascinating insight into the lives of the ship's crew.

To alleviate their boredom during the winter months berthed at Dealy Island off the south shore of Melville Island, Canada, the men would put on performances complete with costumes and advertising playbills such as this one.

After the 1853 season advertised on this example, HMS Resolute became stuck in ice and had to be abandoned, later to be found by American whalers and sailed back to Britain to be presented to Queen Victoria in 1856.

As a gesture of thanks, timbers from the ship were gifted in 1880 to American president Rutherford B Hayes, who used them to make the Resolute desk, which is still in use in the White House's Oval Office today.

After significant interest from the UK and America, the successful buyer bid a hammer price of £3,800, with extra fees taking the overall figure paid to £4,750.

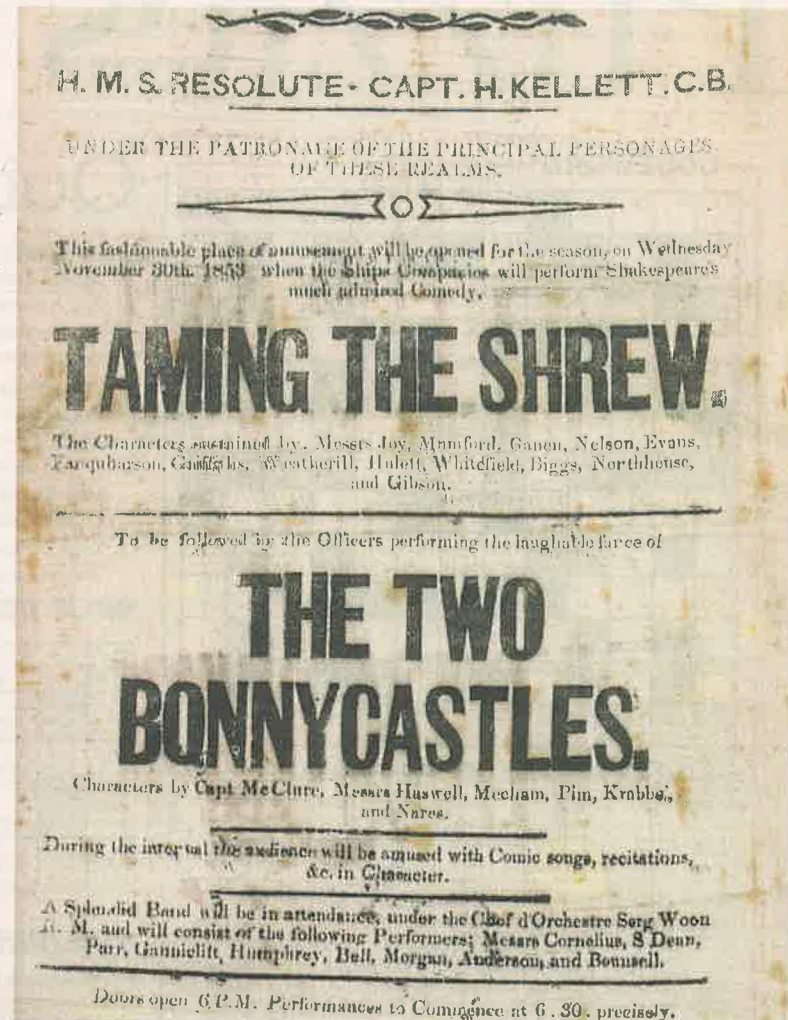


HMS Resolute

Sworders chairman Guy Schooling said: "It's remarkable what still turns up in charity shops. They really would be better taking professional advice before selling their art and antiques.

"However, this was a great find for our vendor, who knew we have a good track record selling items from the so-called heroic age of Polar exploration."

Similar examples of this playbill can be found in the collections of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, and the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.



The playbill printed aboard HMS Resolute during its Arctic expedition