

# Basic Detail Report

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## No. 63 "Supplying the Navy: A battleship coaling at sea" [From 'The Great War: Britain's Efforts And Ideals shown in a series of lithographic prints: 'Transport by Sea' series]

Date

1917

Primary Maker

Charles Pears

### Medium

Lithograph on paper

### Dimensions

35 x 45.8 cm

### Description

This is a planographic print (lithograph) on paper, and is part of a series entitled 'The Great War: Britain's Efforts And Ideals shown in a series of lithographic prints: 'Transport by Sea' series. There are a total of six lithographs in this particular series, and in total there are ten series. The lithographs are numbered as if the entire ten series are one, so this print is number 63. Pears' series of lithographs depicts the unglamorous but absolutely vital contribution of the Merchant Navy to the war effort. As an island nation Britain relied heavily on mercantile shipping to maintain the flow of imports and exports which fuelled the economy and prevented the population from going hungry. Pears' lithographs are energetic and display striking effects of light and shade. They lend the Merchant Navy something of the heroism more often associated with the activities of the Royal Navy. At the beginning of the war Britain imposed a naval blockade on Germany which would greatly weaken the country's economy. Germany likewise attempted to cut off supply lines to Britain by attacking British shipping and both countries laid mines in strategically important areas. In 1915 and again in 1917 Germany declared the waters around Britain and Ireland to be a war zone. Merchant ships were always vulnerable to attack and were progressively armed. However, German submarines inflicted heavy losses on the merchant fleet and by 1917 Britain was struggling to maintain control of the seas. In that year, with the introduction of the convoy system to protect shipping and the entry of the United States into the war, the tide began to turn. In his lithographs Pears illustrates some of the key tasks which fell to the Merchant Navy. A huge variety of merchant ships contributed to the war effort, from passenger liners and ferries to more humble cargo ships. The duties of the merchant fleet included transporting essential supplies such as foodstuffs, coal and military equipment, as well as troops going to the front. In an official history of the Merchant Navy written in the 1920s, Edward, Prince of Wales,

later to become Edward VIII, wrote of the men of the Merchant Navy: "they faced without hesitation the tremendous odds and the frequent hazard of death, undaunted in spirit to the bitter end. Let us not forget, also, that had it been otherwise this country of ours must have perished." Geoffrey Prendergast 2014 This print depicts boats in a choppy sea and a zeppelin in the sky overhead. Pears tended to specialize in marine scenes and was later appointed the first president of the Society of Naval Artists. Throughout his career he also worked as an illustrator, contributing to *The Yellow Book*, the *Illustrated London News*, *Punch*, *The Graphic* and other periodicals. As a designer of posters, his images for the London Metropolitan Railway ('Southend', 1915) and the Empire Marketing Board ('The Empire Highway to India', 1928) reached a wide audience. During the First World War, Pears was appointed an official war artist to the Admiralty in addition to holding a commission in the Royal Marines.