

# Scattered Memories and Frozen Bones

## Revealing a Sailor of the Franklin Expedition, 1845-48

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### SIR JOHN FRANKLIN'S LAST EXPEDITION

The British-dominated search for a North-West Passage (a sea link between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans via the Arctic) had been going on for over 300 years, when in 1845, the Royal Geographical Society coaxed the Admiralty into making one more attempt at finding the route. At age 59, Capt. Sir John Franklin<sup>1</sup> was appointed to command Her Majesty's Ships *Erebus* (Commander James Fitzjames)<sup>2</sup> and *Terror* (Capt. Francis Crozier)<sup>3</sup>. These ships were no strangers to the ice; the *Terror* served in the Arctic from 1836-37, and both vessels were under the command of Sir James Clark Ross on three Antarctic voyages between 1839-43,<sup>4</sup> during which time Crozier commanded the *Terror*.

After over two years passed and no word was heard from the Franklin Expedition, overland and seaborne search expeditions from 1847-55 determined that all 129 officers and men of the Franklin Expedition had perished somewhere near King William Island.



*Perilous position of H.M.S. 'Terror', Captain Back, in the Arctic Regions in the summer of 1837, by William Smyth (National Maritime Museum, London) First Lieut. Smyth was with the 1836-37 expedition.*

The *Erebus* and *Terror* were never found. It was the 19th century equivalent of the Space Shuttle *Challenger* disaster. From 1857-59, a private expedition, sponsored by Lady Franklin and public subscription, was sent to search the area of King William Island. Capt. Francis L. McClintock, RN,<sup>5</sup> commanded the screw yacht *Fox* in an attempt to establish how the explorers died and to bring back relics.



Base 801427 (R01930) 4-97

The Canadian Arctic. King William Island is directly above the word NORTHWEST. ([www.treks.org](http://www.treks.org), 1999)



**The Central Arctic, detail (*Exploring Polar Frontiers*, by W.J. Mills, Vol. 1, 2003)**  
**King William Island is near the bottom center, with Cape Herschel on its south coast.**

McClintock's second-in-command, Lieut. William R. Hobson, RN,<sup>6</sup> found a document signed by Capt. Crozier and Fitzjames in a large cairn (a man-made stone landmark) near Victory Point, on the southwest coast of King William Island. The document was dated 28 April 1848 and indicated the *Erebus* and *Terror* were abandoned three days previous, having been beset in Victoria Strait since 12 September 1846. 'Sir John Franklin died on the 11th June 1847 and the total loss by deaths in the Expedition has



been to date 9 Officers and 15 Men', ran the document. Further reference was made to 'the late Commander Gore'.<sup>7</sup> Crozier's stated intention was to start with the survivors on 26 April 1848 for the Great Fish River (Back River) on the North American mainland.

Information in the document proved that Franklin and his men discovered a channel of communication between known points in Barrow Strait through to the northern coast of America, thus they became the first to discover a North-West Passage.

The document clearly shows that, when the ships were abandoned, Franklin, Gore and seven other officers were already dead, as were 15 men. Two of these men died in January 1846, John Torrington, Leading Stoker (*Terror*)<sup>8</sup> and John Hartnell, AB (*Erebus*),<sup>9</sup> while Pte. William Braine, RM, (*Erebus*)<sup>10</sup> died in April that same year. All three graves were positively identified from carved inscriptions on wooden headboards found on Beechey Island by search expeditions in 1850. In the 1980s each body was exhumed for scientific examination.<sup>11</sup>



**The three graves of Franklin's crewmen on Beechey Island, off the southwestern coast of Devon Island (drawn by J. Hamilton, after a sketch by E.K. Kane; *The U.S. Grinnell Expedition in Search of Sir John Franklin: A Personal Narrative*, by E.K. Kane, 1854)**

Since the expedition sailed into the central Arctic with 24 officers and 105 men in 1845, 15 officers and 90 men were still living at the beginning of the death march toward the Great Fish River. As the above document was signed by Crozier and Fitzjames, and Third Lieut. John Irving (*Terror*)<sup>12</sup> is noted therein as being alive at the time of writing, three of the 15 surviving officers can be positively identified. A fourth may have been Second Lieut. Henry T.D. Le Vesconte (*Erebus*).<sup>13</sup>

Besides the three graves on Beechey Island (two sailors and a marine), the remains of only one other man were subsequently positively identified among the scattering of bones found up and down King William Island.

## FEW VOICES FROM THE GRAVE

In 1869, an American expedition under Charles Hall found a skeleton on the south coast of the King William Island. It was taken back to the United States and sent to England in November 1872 by Rear Adm. Edward A. Inglefield, the Naval Attaché in Washington (and Franklin Search veteran).<sup>14</sup> Although the remains were later identified by a gold filling, when the skeleton was interred under the floor of the vestibule of Greenwich's Painted Hall in 1873, it was described as 'One of Franklin's companions.' Subsequently, this place was converted into an officer's mess hall, and the remains reinterred at the base of the Franklin Monument, which is on the wall of the Chapel. During this process, an inscription was found on the lid of the container: 'This box contains Human Bones, conjectured to have been the skeleton of Lt. H.T.D. Le Vesconte', and a description of their finding by Hall.<sup>15</sup>

During the 1878-80 expedition led by US Cavalry Lieut. Frederick Schwatka, the primary object of the search was to follow up on recent Eskimo reports that records and journals from the Franklin Expedition might still exist on King William Island. On the western shore of the island, a grave built above ground with flat sandstone slabs was discovered by Heinrich W. Klutschak.<sup>16</sup> A skull and other human bones lay just outside it. On a rock at one end of the grave was a silver medal, estimated to be 2½ - 2¾ inches in diameter and so thickly covered in grime that Klutschak did not notice it at first glance since it was the same colour as the rock. The silver medal bore on one side a bas-relief of the British king, surrounded by 'GEORGIUS III D.G. BRITANNIARUM REX. 1820'. On the other side was a laurel wreath within the wording 'SECOND MATHEMATICAL PRIZE/ROYAL NAVAL COLLEGE,' and inside the finely engraved words, 'Awarded to John Irving, Midsummer 1830'.<sup>17</sup> The medal had been placed in the grave along with the dead man (lieutenant on board *Terror*) about thirty years earlier. During this long period it had even left a mark on the rock, and it provided definite proof as to the identity of the person buried here.<sup>18</sup>



**John Irving's mathematical prize medal (Lieut. John Irving, R.N. of H.M.S. "*Terror*," in Sir John Franklin's Last Expedition to the Arctic Regions: A Memorial Sketch with Letters, by B. Bell (editor), 1881)**

On 7 January 1881, Lieut. Irving's remains were laid to rest with full military honours Dean Cemetery, Edinburgh.<sup>19</sup> The full description of Irving's stone memorial is worth repeating:

*Celtic cross carved with interlaced decoration. The inscription is placed on the shaft. Two carved rope bands run round the top of the base. The base is carved with a relief showing crew members preparing to bury Irving as his body is dragged across the ice to the shore. The two expedition ships are shown beset*

*in the background. The two sides of Irving's silver mathematics medal are shown above. This was found near his original grave and was the principal means by which the remains were identified.*<sup>20</sup>

Thus, out of 129 officers and men of the Franklin Expedition, human hands can so far only apply names to a mere four mortal remains – only four out of all those men.

## THE FROZEN GHOST

One spring afternoon, I was challenged with resurrecting one of Franklin's frozen ghosts. A possible link to the Franklin Expedition was discovered on 13 May 1995; oddly, it was only six days prior to the 150th anniversary of the expedition's departure from England. On this day, I spied a China Medal 1842 to William Gibson, HMS *Wanderer*, on a medal dealer's list.<sup>21</sup> Both the name and ship were familiar to me and my memory cells were set apace, aided by eager fingers clawing their way through bulky folders of accumulated notes.



**The China Medal 1842 posthumously awarded to William Gibson, HMS *Wanderer* (courtesy of Dix Noonan Webb, London)**

In 1990 I had read a 36-year-old article by polar historians R.J. Cyriax and A.G.E. Jones<sup>22</sup> about a pocketbook containing papers found by McClintock near a skeleton on King William Island. The skeleton was undisturbed and had not been discovered by Eskimos. After returning home, the papers were examined and McClintock presumed the remains were those of Henry Peter (Harry) Peglar, Capt. Fore Top, HMS *Terror*, since there was a seaman's parchment certificate which bore Peglar's name and a narrative of his sea service. The papers are significant because they represent the only personal papers recovered from the Franklin Expedition.

I moved onto medallic matters and noted that Peglar served on the 16-gun brig-sloop *Wanderer* from 1839-44, and was thus likely entitled to the China Medal 1842; the *Wanderer* participated in operations during the last stages of the Opium War. Research in early 1993 confirmed the entitlement and that Peglar's China Medal was delivered to a woman with a different last name on 23 May 1857<sup>23</sup> (no doubt the married sister).<sup>24</sup> According to the Arctic Medal 1818-1855 Roll (a list of those entitled the medal), this medal was delivered to his legal representative on the same day (again his sister).<sup>25</sup> As for the mysterious skeleton, it lay hidden in a crevasse in my mind, waiting to be reawakened by future revelations.

While reviewing the *Wanderer's* China Medal 1842 Roll, a certain William Gibson, Ordinary Seaman, caught my eye. I was comparing names with those individuals entitled to Arctic Medals as listed in Neville Poulson's *The White Ribbon*, curious to know if any other "Wanderers" were so entitled. Two men named Gibson appeared: William T. Gibson, Carpenter's Mate, HMS *Investigator* (1848-49), and William Gibson, Steward, HMS *Terror*, (1845-48). The first man was not a possibility, as he served an apprenticeship at Chatham Dockyard before volunteering for Arctic service, and was not connected to the *Wanderer* or the China War.<sup>26</sup> The China Roll entry for the second William Gibson states:

Gibson DD G.4146 William Ord[inary Seaman] Delivd. 28/2/56

This entry struck me as odd. By way of comparison, I had studied China Medal entries for men aboard HMS *Hazard* and in every case where a man was Discharged Dead (DD), a specific month, day and year was noted – and there was no indication of a medal being issued to next-of-kin – so why was Gibson different? If this man was the same one who served on the *Terror*, the date of death could not have been known. I made a notation in my files that Steward Gibson was probably entitled to the China Medal, but carried my research and theorizing no further. I had no real expectation of ever encountering this piece, as it was not listed on the (incomplete) roll of "surviving" China Medals compiled by the well known naval collector and researcher Kenneth J. Douglas-Morris.

Now Gibson's medal beckoned – but I was faced with a nagging concern I could not ignore. Assuming Ordinary Seaman Gibson was paid off the *Wanderer* with Peglar in June 1844, how could he regress to a domestic rating by the time he joined the *Terror* the following spring? What I needed was a comparable scenario, so I scanned Douglas-Morris' voluminous published medal collection and found one James Richman. His medallic trio, consisting of the Crimea Medal with clasps for Sebastopol and Azoff, Baltic Medal and Turkish Crimea Medal, provided the "case law" I sought. All three medals were engraved 'J.W. RICHMAN', and records revealed that *Ordinary Seaman* Richman served in the Baltic (1854) on the *Stromboli*, but afterwards became a *Subordinate Officers' Cook* on the same vessel in Crimean waters. Little did I know that the ensuing research trail would entangle me in a mysterious web of scattered memories and frozen bones.

A few copied pages from the *Terror's* Muster Books<sup>27</sup> solidified my hunch: Gibson's previous ship was indeed the *Wanderer*, which paid off (ended its commission) on 27 June 1844. He next joined the *Terror* on 11 March 1845. A bold notation in the 30 June 1845 Muster Book officially closed the crypt on the Franklin Expedition in a typically official laconic fashion:

*By A.O. [Admiralty Order] 18 January 1854 No 263 inclosing Notice from the Gazette, it is directed that if they are not heard of previous to 31 March 1854, the officers & crew of HMS Terror are to be removed from the Navy List & are to be considered as having died in the Service – Their wages are to be paid to their Relatives to that Date – By A.O. 1 April 1854 No. 1638 all Books & Papers are to be dispensed with*

The 'G.4146' notation by Gibson's name on the China Medal 1842 Roll now acquired particular meaning, as it was a direct link to claims of executors and next-of-kin for back pay of ratings who died in service;



'G' = Gibson, while '4146' = the claim number.<sup>28</sup> The document revealed 'HMS "Terror" ' inscribed at the top. Bureaucratic wheels were set in motion on 11 April, when the Navy Accountant General took action on Stewart Gibson's claim for his son's arrears of pay – the very day it was received by that office. The result was a preliminary questionnaire being sent to his residence at 12 Upper Rathbone Place, Marylebone, Middlesex (London).

Over the next three weeks, pay records were researched and a blank petition with a letter were sent to the minister of Gibson's parish, along with an instructional letter to Gibson. The following notation was made on 3 June: 'to Call with two Householders'. This snippet will have some significance, as the reader will soon see. The claim was admitted on the same day, and thirteen days later, the process was complete. A handwritten notation at the bottom, right-hand side of the document refers to the general amount paid out to William's father, 'Seaman/under £200'. A search at St. Catherine's House for a possible will, through books covering 1842-52 inclusive, was unsuccessful<sup>29</sup> – not unusual for a working-class individual.

Gibson's entitlement to the Arctic Medal nudged open another portal in his family's life. The Arctic Medal Roll shows William's medal was, 'Delivd. to Charlotte D. James on behalf of the Father who is in Australia 24/6/57'<sup>30</sup> – only six weeks after the *London Gazette* announcement authorizing distribution of the award. Hence, sometime between June 1854 and June 1857, Stewart Gibson, the London tailor, sailed to Australia. But why? Was he a traveler, convict or colonist? The first option was highly unlikely, as people of very modest means did not go globe hopping. If he was a convicted criminal and was sent to a penal colony, he cannot be traced, as the records for convicts and the like dwindle in the 1830s.<sup>31</sup> Then I thought about his son's arrears of pay. Was this a clue? Remembering the 'two Householders' at the residence above, did Stewart use the money to emigrate and start a new life, leaving the married sister to claim the Arctic Medal?



**An example of the Arctic Medal 1818-1855, which was issued to veterans and their next-of-kin without naming on the edge.**

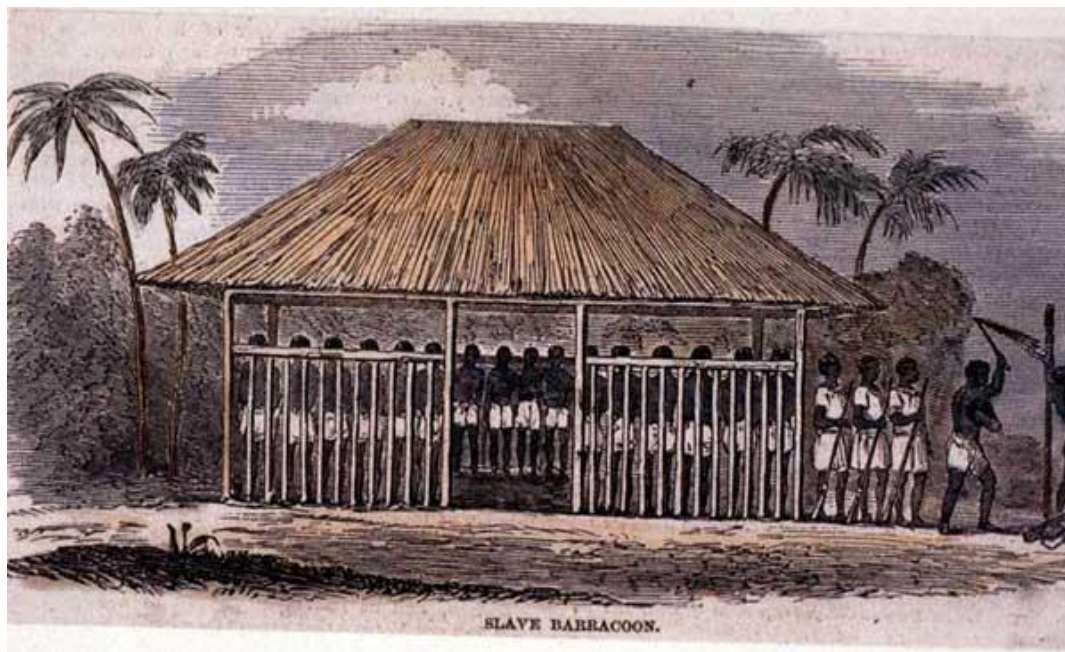


## THE WANDERER

Flipping the hourglass, I was all the while delving into William Gibson's life, and on the face of it, there were few leads to intimately resurrect the man. Born in London, he probably grew up in the same residence listed for his father, which was an impoverished eastern area of the city. He volunteered at Sheerness in January 1840 as a first entry into the Navy, aged 17 years, 6 months, and was rated a Captain's Cook. However, within days he was re-rated a Boy 1st Class. His first ship was the *Wanderer*, with a crew of approximately 110 souls – theirs was a close-knit wooden world, and the "Wanderers" lived up to their name.

During the next 4 1/2 years, the crew fought enemies of the British Empire as well as those who robbed their fellow human beings of dignity – these were the slave traders along the Gallinas River, on the west African coast. Commander the Hon. Joseph Denman was the senior officer on that part of the coast, and he and his "Wanderers" destroyed large slave barracoons (enclosures to confine slaves) in 1840. Wading through muddy brackish water and sleeping in damp clothes on swampy ground invited sickness and sixteen men were disabled by malaria.<sup>32</sup> For the first time, instead of simply intercepting slavers as they entered or left harbours, direct action was taken to strike at the root of this barbaric trade.

This work had important repercussions. With the barracoons destroyed, the exportation of between 12,000-15,000 slaves per year had been checked at the very place that was long regarded as the heart of the trade. Denman's actions were strongly approved by the home government and he was promoted to Captain. Meanwhile, other naval officers followed his example.



A slave barracoon in Sierra Leone. (*Illustrated London News*, 14 April 1849)



A typical impression of an early Victorian Royal Navy sailor in his uniform for going ashore.  
(*Hurrah for the Life of a Sailor!: Life on the lower-deck of the Victorian Navy*, by John Winton, 1977)

By July 1842, Gibson had been an Ordinary Seaman for nine months and his ship now formed part of a squadron on the Yangtze River, participating in the last stages of the Chinese Opium War. A body of seamen and marines from the squadron accompanied a force of more than 6,600 soldiers attacking the city of Chingkiang on the 21st. A certain Lieut. James Fitzjames brought up some rockets and made good use of them during the assault; he was wounded afterwards, while attempting to get off a rocket during a street battle.<sup>33</sup> Mate George Henry Hodgson, a *Cornwallis* shipmate, also distinguished himself that day.<sup>34</sup> Promoted to Lieutenant in December,<sup>35</sup> Hodgson joined the *Wanderer* on 5 April 1843.<sup>36</sup>



By February 1844, Hodgson was part of a 150-man boat expedition from the *Wanderer*, the sloop *Harlequin* and the East India Company's steamer *Diana*, attacking pirates in northern Borneo. Hodgson landed under heavy fire with his men in the *Wanderer*'s cutter and carried a stockade mounting some brass guns; which were then embarked. This sharp affair resulted in eleven serious casualties, two of whom later died of their wounds. Among the severely wounded was the *Wanderer*'s Gunner, Thomas Loar<sup>37</sup>, who was hit in three places by musket balls. After the ship arrived home, he was invalided to Haslar Hospital. The pirates lost between 50 and 70 killed, mainly at the stockade.<sup>38</sup>

When the *Wanderer* paid off on 27 June and the men who had seen so much blood letting and human suffering on two continents went their separate ways. Some of them would be reunited in less than a year's time to begin a very different journey – a journey to seek a North-West Passage. They were to be bonded again, not in life-and-death combat with other men, but in a struggle against a much more tenacious foe, one which ultimately demanded pitting their bodies and souls against overwhelming natural forces.



An Illanun pirate of Borneo (*Borneo and the Indian Archipelago*, by F.S. Marryat, 1848)

## JOINING THE *TERROR*

Three former "Wanderers" volunteered for the Franklin's Expedition – all for service in HMS *Terror*: Peglar joined the ship on 11 March, Hodgson the next day and Gibson on the 19th.<sup>39</sup> Hodgson must have been Fitzjames' friend, or at least made an impression on him, as Fitzjames recommended Hodgson for an





And that was it – everything I knew about William Gibson. Like nearly all of Franklin's men, he simply vanished in the ice and snow. What happened to him? Something drew me back to Cyriax and Jones' article about the frozen bones found by McClintock in 1859<sup>42</sup> and that skeleton sheltering in the back of my mind slowly began creeping toward the light of new knowledge.

## MYSTERIOUS SKELETON

On 25 May 1859, McClintock came upon a partly-exposed skeleton on the coast of King William Island, east of Cape Herschel. His opinion was that the individual had fallen forward and gone to sleep, but Carl Petersen, his Danish Interpreter in the Eskimo language, was of a different mind; he thought the man might have sat down to rest on the stone just behind the skeleton and fallen forward attempting to stand up. McClintock fitted together several fragments of uniform and clothing, and was able to determine exactly what the man had worn. These fragments convinced McClintock that the man had either been an officer's servant or a steward, right down to 'the loose bow-knot in which his neck-handkerchief was tied not being used by seamen or officers.' The man had succeeded in making it some 135 miles from where Erebus and Terror were abandoned on 22 April 1848. More than likely, he got separated from a larger party.



*Starvation Cove*, by Julius von Payer, 1897 (courtesy of the Geophysical Institute of the Academy of Sciences, Czech Republic) In 1880, Schwatka's expedition discovered the remains of Franklin Expedition members King William Island, and named the place Starvation Cove. Julius Payer was an Arctic explorer who attempted to capture the event as closely as possible, drawing primarily on Schwatka's writings. In London, Payer also studied all the artefacts discovered by rescue expeditions, as well as original portrait photographs taken before Franklin left England; he also sketched portraits of expedition officers. *Starvation Cove* was originally painted in 1883, and in 1897 Payer painted this replica.



Cyriax and Jones questioned McClintock's assumption that the skeleton belonged to Peglar and their argument centered around the uniform. Peglar was never a steward or officer's servant in the Royal Navy and it seems highly improbable that a first class petty officer would don the uniform of a lowly domestic. McClintock stated that when the possessor of the pocketbook left the ship, he had 'dressed himself in his best shore-going clothes, the clothes reserved to be worn on the day of landing once more in England'. Jones commented that 'They may have used their best clothes as their working clothes were worn out after 3+ years.'<sup>43</sup> Seemingly, the only other possibility is that the clothing situation was desperate and Peglar wore whatever was on hand.

The scene near Cape Herschel also divulged an important clue missed by Cyriax and Jones. Nearby the skeleton was a half sovereign dated 1844, a sixpence dated 1831, a horn pocket comb containing some light brown hairs, the pocketbook, and a small *clothes brush*. The last item has particular significance: a clothes brush is *just* the sort of thing a *real* steward or officer's servant would have in his possession.



**The pocketbook found near the Cape Herschel skeleton (National Maritime Museum, London)**





**The clothes brush found near the Cape Herschel skeleton (National Maritime Museum, London)**

So if the skeleton was not Peglar, who was it, and how did that person come to possess Peglar's papers? There is no doubt that the remains were those of a Franklin Expedition member and Cyriax and Jones conjectured that he may have been a friend – someone entrusted with Peglar's seaman's certificate. Such a certificate was very valuable, for it represented an official record by which the sailor could prove his naval service and thus gain further employment. Peglar would have only given this document to someone he trusted. Cyriax and Jones suggest that Thomas Armitage, Gun Room Steward in the *Terror*, may have been such a friend. He is referred to in official documents as Armitage or Harmitage.

Also among the papers was a narrative of Peglar's sea service, and though unsigned, there is little doubt it was written by Peglar; the handwriting is clear, though the spelling is poor. Another sheet dated 21 April 1847 has words of a sea shanty (song) and was written in the identical hand of the narrative of sea service.

All the handwriting on the remaining papers is in the same hand, which is entirely *different* from the above documents. Jones did not compare the handwritings for their article, as this was left up to Dr. Cyriax.<sup>44</sup> Many of the words are spelt backwards and Jones commented, 'For half-educated people, writing backwards would have been quite an achievement. The sort of things we did as boys.'<sup>45</sup> There is evidence that some of the writings were jointly produced by Peglar and one of his shipmates, and this is discussed below. Included in the fragmented and sometimes illegible lower deck doggerel are descriptions of sea creatures and places visited, with the latter providing clues as to the possible identity of the skeleton.

The question arose in the author's mind as to whether or not sources exist that contain handwriting samples for Armitage and Gibson, so as to perhaps one day compare the writing in the papers written in a hand different from Peglar's. When Gibson and Armitage joined the Royal Navy, sailors were only employed for as long as a ship was commissioned (usually three to five years), and had no long-term contract. A system of long-term contracts (called Continuous Service) was not introduced for most ratings until 1853, and naturally men had to sign these documents, or make their marks if they were illiterate (write an 'X').

Another source would be a will, but neither Gibson or Armitage left one. Most intriguingly, however, the author did obtain a photocopy of Armitage's 1826 marriage certificate. This document simply has 'X' his

mark' (ADM 44/A10), and bears out that – at that time – he was illiterate. There is no way to tell if, between 1826 and the late 1840s, Armitage learned to read and write, though he certainly would have had the time to learn and practice while at sea. Consequently, there do not appear to be any sources of handwriting samples for either Gibson or Armitage.

At the end of their article, Cyriax and Jones suggested Peglar's friend may have been Armitage,<sup>46</sup> and Jones reinforces this suggestion in his 1984 article.<sup>47</sup> But I wondered – could it have been *Gibson* McClintock found? I began casting a wide net for more information.

I wrote to A.G.E. Jones, asking him if he made the connection between Peglar and Gibson, but he replied, 'The Wanderer – I did not look closely at the muster book and description book, and did not list another of Franklin's men...tracing [ratings] backwards to previous ships is a labour, which I do not undertake unless I really want to complete a man's history.'<sup>48</sup> To the extent surviving records permitted, I had the service careers of the remaining stewards researched (two on *Terror* and four on *Erebus*), to determine if any of them crossed paths with Peglar during their time in the Royal Navy. None had any evident links to Peglar.

In writing about the skeletal remains, McClintock declared, 'This victim was a young man, slightly built, and perhaps above the common height...' and '...the limbs and smaller bones [were] either dissevered or gnawed away by smaller animals.'<sup>49</sup> How did McClintock, a Royal Navy Captain, without any medical background, determine the age, build and height of a skeleton lying down, particularly with its limbs either separated or eaten away?<sup>50</sup> Neither Armitage or Peglar could be described as "young" when they died; in 1848, Armitage was about 40 years old and Peglar about 36 years of age. In 1834, Armitage was 5' 9" tall and Peglar was 5' 7 1/2" tall. In the end, the skeleton cannot offer any hard evidence respecting its identity.

The only other human remains were the light brown hairs in the horn pocket comb, which had gone through some 12 summer bleachings and winter freezes, apart from whatever shades of brown they were in the first place. They cannot offer any clues, since Peglar, Armitage and Gibson all had brown hair.

## **WEIGHING UP THE EVIDENCE**

### **Evidence linking Peglar and Armitage:**

- (1) Both were on the *Gannett* between May 1834 and June 1837. She was an 18-gun brig-sloop, with approximately 130 crew.<sup>51</sup>
- (2) The pocketbook found near the skeleton contained Peglar's seaman's certificate, a document that would only have been in the possession of a trusted friend.
- (3) Some of the writings in a different hand made reference to a place called Cumanar (presumably Cumaná, Venezuela, where both men visited in the *Gannett* from late 1834 until January 1835). At one point, Jones wrote, 'I put my money on Thomas Armitage because of the connection with Cumana.'<sup>52</sup>

### **Evidence linking Peglar and Gibson:**

- (1) Both were on the *Wanderer* during January 1840 to June 1844, when the ship was paid off.<sup>53</sup> This was a longer and more recent link with Peglar.
- (2) Peglar's seaman's certificate. Gibson was a deck sailor on the *Wanderer*, rather than a domestic like

Armitage on the *Gannett*. Gibson therefore would of had closer contact aboard the *Wanderer* with a first class petty officer like Peglar, in her boats and onshore, serving in any punitive operations against the slavers and pirates.

- (3) One sheet of paper begins: 'O Death, whare is thy sting, the grave at Comfort Cove for who has any douat how. . .the dyer sad and whare traffalegar, etc.' Most of the words are spelt backwards and many that follow are illegible, so the full meaning cannot be understood. The writer appears to have drawn parallels between the biblical verse shown below and current events, events of the recent past and an event from the distant past. To ease the analysis of the readable portion, it is best to break it down into three parts:

(a) 'O Death, whare is thy sting' was obviously taken from the Burial Service or the New Testament. The full verse is from the King James' Bible, 1Corinthians 15:55: 'O DEATH, WHERE IS THY STING? O GRAVE, WHERE IS THY VICTORY?'. The other side of the paper (see below) features words that are connected to the *Terror* (evidently in the Arctic), so 'O Death, whare is thy sting' may foreshadow the doom that was to overtake the writer and his shipmates.

(b) The segment 'the grave at Comfort Cove' is particularly noteworthy for two reasons: first, Peglar and Gibson visited Ascension Island in the *Wanderer* from August to September 1840 and again in 1841. The island became a base for ships' crews to rest and recuperate from anti-slave trade operations.<sup>54</sup> Between the 1830s and 1860s, the site chosen to quarantine fever victims was known as Comfort Cove (also called Comfortless Cove, the name it retains today). Second, the reference to 'the grave' corresponds to little graveyards dotting that place.<sup>55</sup> There were several sick crewmen among the "Wanderers" from anti-slave trade operations, so this could also be a reference to a dead shipmate or to the graveyards generally.

(c) The words 'whare traffalegar' are an apparent allusion to the historic 1805 naval victory off Cape Trafalgar, Spain. Every sailor knew this battle, so the reference could mean anything.

- (4) On the other side of the paper are the only writings that can be directly connected with the *Terror*, presumably while in the Arctic. There is a reference to a 'camp clear'. It seems likely that this place was set up onshore, near where the *Terror* and *Erebus* were beset in the ice. Such temporary camps existed all along the coast of King William Island, along the line of retreat toward the North American mainland. With the references to Comfort Cove and the words 'you peglar', there is the strong suggestion of a joint writing effort.

Along with the various locations noted among all the papers, there is a reference to an Asham Bay, Trinidad. In Jamaican Creole, asham is parched, sweetened and ground corn,<sup>56</sup> but I cannot find any place named Asham Bay (only the town of Asham, Nigeria). Asham Bay easily could have been a local name, or one made up by Peglar and/or his shipmate, and thus not found on any map. Peglar spent several months at Port Royal, Jamaica, during 1825-26. Though he afterward visited most places on the West Indies Station, I have no evidence that he called on Trinidad. There is a year or two gap in his service in the early 1830s and he may have spent time aboard a merchant ship before again entering the Royal Navy. If he served aboard a merchant ship during this period, it would be impossible to trace him.

There is also no definite evidence that Armitage ever visited Trinidad or Ascension, but a seven-year gap in his service exists between 1827 and 1834, and he too may have served aboard a merchant ship during this time. He joined the *Gannett* in 1834, and from this ship went to the 16-gun brig *Serpent* in June 1837,<sup>57</sup> serving at Port Royal. The time between Armitage leaving the *Serpent* and joining the *Terror* is another gap in his life that remains unfilled. Because Gibson did not have seagoing experience when he joined the Royal Navy and served on only two vessels before he died, his movements can be tracked with



even greater precision. His ships never called on Trinidad or Cumaná, but the Wanderer twice visited Ascension Island while Gibson was aboard.

Without more evidence, Franklin's sailor will never fully regain his identity. However, the author admits a certain pride upon reading two comments Mr. A.G.E. Jones penned to him during the search for answers to this mystery: 'On the balance, it may have been more likely Gibson, not Armitage.'<sup>58</sup> and afterward, 'Weighing up the tangible and intangible evidence, and the gaps in our knowledge, Gibson looks a better bet.'<sup>59</sup>

As a footnote to the Franklin Expedition tragedy, in May 1859 McClintock purchased a relic from the Inuit near Cape Norton, on King William Island's east coast. It was a silver tablespoon bearing Franklin's crest, with the initials 'W.G.' scratched upon it.<sup>60</sup> Only two expedition members bore these initials, one was William Goddard, Captain of the Hold, HMS *Terror* – the other was our wandering young steward.

A final comment from Mr. Jones provides encouragement for future endeavours: 'Carry on wondering, as that is the way to get to the bottom of a story that everybody has taken for granted.'

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## Footnotes

1 Franklin's Naval General Service Medal 1793-1840 (NGS) with clasps Copenhagen 1801, Trafalgar and B.S. 14 Dec. 1814, was sold at Sotheby's on 26 November 1980 for £10,000 (\$20,700US) to The Canadian War Museum. It is named SIR JOHN FRANKLIN, LIEUT. R.N.; Franklin's Arctic Medal 1818-1855 was issued and the roll shows: '[signed] Edward Sabine 7/5/57 for Lady Franklin'. Edward Sabine (1788-1883) was a Royal Army officer and scientist who participated in three Arctic expeditions between 1818 and 1823. Arctic Medal 1818-1855 Roll (ADM 171/9); However, the NGS is displayed in a case with an Arctic Medal engraved: JOHN H. BUCHAN. MIDSHIPMAN. H.M.S. DOROTHEA. The Arctic Medal Roll shows Buchan's medal was issued.

2 Fitzjames' medal group sold at Glendining's, 20-21 December 1927, lot 367, £2 17s 6d. I have not been able to find any trace of it after this date and it may be held by a private/public institution. It consisted of the NGS with clasp Syria (Lieut./Ganges); China Medal 1842 (Lieut./Cornwallis); Royal Humane Society's silver medal (Midshipman/Euphrates/Liverpool Dock/January 1835; the catalogue description states 1836); St. Jean d'Acre Medal (silver). It seems likely his agent claimed his NGS while Fitzjames was on the Arctic expedition. The China Medal 1842 Roll (ADM 171/12) shows this medal was issued '6/3/51', evidently claimed by an agent. The Arctic Medal Roll does not show the issue of this medal.

3 The Arctic Medal Roll does not show the issue of Crozier's medal, but it was claimed by Mr. Rawdon Crozier, his great-great-nephew, and presented to him on 5 August 1988.

4 Ross qualified for the medal based on seven Arctic expeditions and was sent the award on 16 August 1857. That same year, he wrote to the Admiralty requesting the Arctic Medal for his crews who voyaged to Antarctica, but his request was refused.

5 McClintock signed for his original Arctic Medal on 13 May 1857 and was sent a duplicate on 16 December 1892. According to Poulsom & Myres, both medals are known to exist and are engraved. A third medal named to McClintock exists (see Dix Noonan Webb, 16 September 2010, lot 617).

6 Hobson signed for his Arctic Medal.

7 The Arctic Medal Roll does not show the issue of Gore's medal. Though he was a Midshipman onboard the *Albion* during the Battle of Navarino, nobody claimed his NGS with clasp Navarino on his behalf. Gore's China service requires a bit of unraveling. According Markham (1875), Gore served as a Lieutenant on the *Herald* during the China War. Cyriax (1939) states Gore was a Lieutenant in the *Volage* during the conflict. He does not appear on the China Medal 1842 Roll for the *Herald* and if he was aboard the *Volage*, that ship did not qualify for the China Medal. The *Volage* did see action at the capture of Chusan and the Bogue Forts, but she left the Far East in December 1840 and returned to England. Qualification for the award was for participation in actions beginning in January 1841.

8 The Arctic Medal Roll does not show the issue of Torrington's medal.

9 The Arctic Medal Roll states 'D.D. 4th Jan. 1846.', but does not show the issue of his medal, even though the medal to his brother Thomas (also on the *Erebus*) was sent on 29 May 1857. Their descendants are in possession of several documents and letters, including one from the Department of the Accountant General, dated 1 May 1854, stating that 'John Hartnell...died on the 4th January 1846 in debt to the Crown £117.4.8'. Perhaps both medals were claimed, but John's was refused on account of this debt? At length, an Arctic Medal was issued to his great-great-nephew, Mr. Donald Bray, on 8 January 1986. John Hartnell's ship previous to the *Erebus* was the *Volage*, from which he was discharged on 1 February 1845. He therefore may have served under Gore on this ship, but more research is needed to establish this connection.

10 The Arctic Medal Roll does not show the issue of Braine's medal.

11 Cyriax, *op.cit.*; Cyriax (1958); Beattie & Geiger (1987).

12 Irving's Arctic Medal was sent on 14 May 1857.

13 The Arctic Medal Roll does not show the issue of Le Vesconte's medal.

14 Cyriax (1939).

15 Hall (1879) and Owen (1978).

16 Heinrich Wenzel Klutschak (1848-1890) was born in Prague, but emigrated to the United States in 1871. He served as an illustrator and surveyor with the expedition. The following was reported in the United States' *Army & Navy Register* of 14 May 1881: 'The Emperor of Austria has been the first foreign potentate to recognize the importance of Lieutenant Schwatka's expedition. Henry W. Klutschak, a member of the expedition, who has recently been lecturing in Germany on his Arctic experiences, was the recipient of marked attention from the Emperor, who decorated him with the Golden Cross of Honor.'

17 The subsequent custodian of Irving's prize medal came to light through at a special Royal Scottish Geographical Society meeting, commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Franklin's departure, held on 4 June 1895, and the following days. His mathematical prize medal was among objects and images related to Irving lent for an exhibit by The United Service Institution, London.

18 Klutschak (1987) and Gilder (1881) – Gilder was Schwatka's second-in-command.

19 *The Illustrated London News*, 8 January 1881.

20 Maritime Memorials (M552), [www.nmm.ac.uk/memorials/](http://www.nmm.ac.uk/memorials/).

21 The medal, without research, was acquired from Eugene G. Ursual, Military Antiquarian Inc. (List No. 106, May 1995, lot 8478, \$495 (Canadian). It sold at Dix Noonan Webb on 27 June 2007 (lot 187, hammer £8,500).

22 Cyriax & Jones (1954).

23 Distribution of the China Medal 1842 to officers and men of the RN and RM did not begin until August 1846, consequently, those intended for Franklin Expedition members evidently rested on the Navy Accountant General's shelves until being posthumously issued to family members (Douglas-Morris (1987); China Medal 1842 Roll).

24 Jones (1984).

25 Arctic Medal Roll.

26 According to his obituary in the *Naval Warrant Officers' Journal* (1894), Gibson retired as a Chief Carpenter in 1878. The Arctic Medal Roll does not show the issue of his medal.

27 ADM 38/1962.

28 ADM 44/G17.

29 Morris to Stein, 16 January 1996.

30 Arctic Medal Roll.

31 John to Stein, 12 March 1997.

32 Winton (1977).

33 Hall & Bernard (1847).

34 Clowes (1901).

35 Cyriax, *op.cit.*

36 Davis (2004). Though Hodgson appears on the *Cornwallis'* China Medal 1842 Roll, there are no despatch details. The Arctic Medal Roll shows that Edward Sabine signed for Hodgson's and Franklin's medals on the same day (7 May 1857).

37 The China Medal 1842 Roll shows that Loar's medal was sent/delivered to a Portsea address on 28 August 1846. Davis' website has a list of the *Wanderer's* officers, taken from the Muster Book, and the Gunner's surname is shown as 'Goar'. This is probably incorrect and the result of an error in transcribing handwritten records.

38 Course (1966); Rutter (1986).

39 ADM 38/1962.

40 Cyriax, *op.cit.*

41 Cookman (2000).

42 Cyriax & Jones, *op.cit.*

43 Jones to Stein, 28 September 1995.

44 Jones to Stein, 24 August 1995.

45 Jones to Stein, 16 October 1995.

46 Armitage's entry on the Arctic Medal Roll simply states 'Sent', plus the date (which is indistinct). The Roll also indicates an alias which does not appear on the *Terror's* Muster List – Harmitage. However, according to Cyriax &

Jones, both names appear in HMS *Gannett's* Description Book (ADM 37/9149).

47 Jones, 1984.

48 Jones to Stein, 24 August 1995.

49 McClintock (1859).

50 Jones to Stein, 24 August & 28 September 1995. Another example of a non-medical person making such a determination can be found in Heindrich Klutschak's Overland to Starvation Cove: '...we found a skull [at Franklin Point] which Lieutenant Schwatka immediately identified as that of a white man.'

51 Lavery (1989).

52 Jones to Stein, 24 August 1995.

53 Jones (1984).

54 Lloyd (1949).

55 Avis (2002) and Weaver (2003).

57 Cyriax & Jones, *op.cit.*

58 Jones to Stein, 24 August 1995.

59 Jones to Stein, 28 September 1995.

60 McClintock, *op.cit.*

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