

The ‘Old Arctics’: notices of Franklin Search expedition veterans in the British press, 1876–1934

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ABSTRACT. The lives of the commanders and officers associated with the British naval searches for the lost John Franklin northwest passage expedition in the 1850s are well-known through their own writings or those of later biographers. The post-Arctic careers of ordinary crew members, on the other hand, are barely known at all. Following digital searches of nineteenth and early-twentieth century British newspapers, we have compiled a list of some notices, obituaries, and reminiscences that shed light on the later years of the ‘Old Arctics’.

Introduction

The lives of the commanders and officers associated with the British naval searches for the lost John Franklin northwest passage expedition in the 1850s are well-known through their own writings or those of later biographers. The post-Arctic careers of ordinary crewmembers, on the other hand, are barely known at all. Following digital searches of British newspapers dated between 1870 and 1940, we have compiled a list of some notices, obituaries, and reminiscences which shed light on what happened to the ‘Old Arctics’, and in some cases, their dependents.

In our survey, we encountered many short obituaries for Arctic veterans involved in the searches. However, in order to provide a deeper understanding of life below deck on Franklin search voyages, and help place the currently available literature and sources into context, we restricted our collection to include only those notices that offered further qualitative detail about the Arctic experiences or post-Arctic careers of ordinary veterans (with the notable exception of William Parker Snow, who served as an officer on *Prince Albert*). (On the ambiguity of Snow’s position see Stone 1993a, 1993b). The survey also uncovered several notices about dependents of the veterans, including two on widows of expedition members that shed light on the domestic narratives the ‘Old Arctics’ passed onto their loved ones. Presented in chronological order, our survey brings together a collection of people bound by shared discovery service in the Arctic, who survived their expeditions but never forgot their experiences.

Although the notices, obituaries, and reminiscences included herein span over half a century and across the geography of Britain, three common themes on the lives of Arctic expeditionary seamen and what happened to them afterwards unites the collection.

Firstly, it is striking to note the advanced ages of the veterans. Of the notices that gave ages, the average age of veterans still living was 77, while the average age of those who died was 85. William Parker Snow died at the

age of 78. Given that many of the men went on to serve in the Baltic and Crimean naval campaigns, and some continued to work in merchant shipping, the longevity of the veterans is remarkable. It is perhaps for this reason that many of the notices assume that the aged veteran in question was ‘the last’ of the Franklin searchers still alive.

Secondly, it is clear that for many veterans their Arctic medal was a treasured possession. The Arctic medal, octagonal to distinguish it from a war medal, was struck in 1857 by order of Queen Victoria. The medal was issued, on application, to all expedition members who had served in the Arctic from John Ross’s voyage in 1818 to the end of the state-sponsored Franklin searches in 1855. Personnel from the Royal Navy and Hudson’s Bay Company could apply, as could the widows of those who served and died on Franklin’s expedition or on those which followed. The obverse side of the medal showed a bust of the Queen while on the reverse side was an image of a ship stuck fast in the ice with a sledging party in the foreground. The medal had the legend, ‘For Arctic Discoveries’. These Arctic medals were passed down through the generations and are still in the possession of some families of the veterans, although they became collectible from the 1890s and appeared in auction lists thereafter. Several are in the collections of museums in the UK. Franklin’s own medal, issued to his widow Lady Franklin in 1857, was sold at Sotheby’s in 1980 to the Canadian War Museum for £10,000 (Stein 2007). These medals were a source of pride for Arctic veterans and would be worn with a white ribbon attached at public or commemorative events. Snow was buried with his medal. More than providing a sense of pride, the medal was also a quick means of proving to acquaintances, employers, and journalists that one had served in the Arctic.

Thirdly, the notices demonstrate that there was no evidence of an Arctic veterans’ network in Britain after the 1850s. As mentioned, journalists, as well as expedition members and their dependents, were quick to announce that the subject of their notices was ‘the last’

survivor of the Franklin expedition era. These were statements that predictably drew responses from other survivors. This lack of knowledge about the fate of survivors extended even to old crewmates, as several veterans of *Investigator* were clearly unaware that others were still alive. This might be explained by the fact that expedition members came from different parts of Britain, and from different social classes, the lack of any central veterans' organisation, and poor literacy or letter-writing habits among veterans.

Indeed, it was for some of these reasons that Snow campaigned in the 1890s for an 'Explorers' Institute' as the 50th anniversary of Franklin's expedition approached. Snow, who was one of the most eccentric characters involved in the Franklin searches, served in a contested capacity on the brief *Prince Albert* expedition of 1850. Snow's summer in the Arctic furnished him with enough regrets and material for a lifetime of hectoring and dreaming about the Franklin expedition. The letter of Snow's included below is notable for its combination of sentiment and sound ideas. Snow struggled throughout his life to raise cash for his projects and books, frequently relying on philanthropic donations from the Royal Literary Fund and officer veterans like Francis Leopold McClintock to make ends meet. His letter reveals for us the contemporary demand for an institution or network which would serve the needs of elderly ordinary veterans who did not have the private earnings, honours, or society memberships of their officer comrades. Perhaps influenced by Snow's call, on May 20 1895 the Royal Geographical Society held a commemoration of the Franklin expedition at Greenwich where hundreds of invited guests, including 15 veterans of the search expeditions, viewed the Franklin relics at the Royal Hospital before visiting the Franklin monument in the Painted Hall (*Aberdeen Journal* 13 April 1895). Snow, however, did not live to see this, having died at his home on 12 March 1895.

Throughout we have provided some editorial notes in square brackets, but two brief notices require further elaboration. The first notice is that referring to David Bargery, John Stanley, and other veterans of the Arctic voyage of *Rattlesnake* known to be alive in 1903. This voyage, commanded by Henry Trollope, is probably the least known of the Franklin search expeditions. The ship was dispatched to Bering Strait in 1853 to support HMS *Plover* at Point Barrow and its Mate, William Robert Hobson (who later served with McClintock on *Fox*), led an epic sledging expedition across the Seward Peninsula to Chamisso Island (Barr 1986). Hobson's brother-in-law Philip Sharpe, who also served as Mate on the *Rattlesnake*, revealed in his journal that Trollope was not liked by the crew and was known (behind his back) as 'Old Betsy' – as in 'Old Betsy, the trollop'.

The second case is that of John Robinson, who died in 1899. Robinson passed on memories of Arctic experiences which included an unlikely itinerary from Bering Strait to Hudson Bay. However, this remarkable and complex journey did indeed take place. Robinson

wintered with *Plover* at Bukhta Provideniya in 1848–1849 and then joined the boat expedition led by William Pullen and William Hooper which travelled east to the Mackenzie delta. In between summer expeditions, the group wintered at Fort Franklin, by Great Bear Lake in 1849, and at Fort Simpson in 1850. In the summer of 1851 they travelled by the Hudson's Bay Company route via Great Slave Lake, Slave River, Athabasca River, Clearwater River, Methy Portage, Churchill River, Sturgeon Weir River, Saskatchewan River, Lake Winnipeg, and Hayes River to York Factory on Hudson Bay, from where they caught *Prince of Wales* back to London (Hooper 1853; Pullen 1979).

Taken together these notices provide some interesting anecdotal detail on the experiences of ordinary crewmen in the Arctic and their lives afterwards. Veterans of the Franklin search expeditions clearly had positive and negative memories of their time in the north and it is to be regretted that they did not have the kind of networks and organisations later in life that the officer class did.

**'An Arctic Veteran', *The Times* (London)
24 November 1876**

David Baxter, the nephew of an old Arctic sailor, George Baxter, writes to us from 132, Holland-street, Glasgow:- 'Captain Nares, in his account of his voyage to the Arctic Seas, alludes to the voyage of Captain John Ross, R.N., in the years 1829–1833. Will you allow me to bring under the notice of the public, or any society of geographers, or, perhaps, an old shipmate, if there are any still alive, the case of a brave, although worn-out, old seaman who accompanied Captain John Ross, R.N., and Commander James Ross in the *Victory* in the years mentioned? If any one will turn to the volume published by Captain Ross, he will find the name of George Baxter among the crew. They were shut up in the region of eternal frost and snow for a longer period than any other Arctic Expedition, having been locked up for four years, during which time they suffered all the horrors and privations of that inhospitable land, subjected to all the toil and cold and hunger, and only saved by the most superhuman exertions. Since then 43 years have come and gone, and 40 years of that period he has been to sea, sailing in all climates and suffering all the trials and hardships of those who go down to the sea in ships. For the last few years he has been residing at Millport – a small watering-place on the Clyde – and eking out a living by fishing and letting boats in summer. I regret to say he is now so frail and worn out that he is unable to do anything for himself, and, as he has no children, I submit his case to the care and consideration of the nation. Hitherto he has never needed, never asked, and never received a shilling, he having been a quiet-living, respectable man all his life. He is prematurely old, and although my own father is 74, and he eight years younger, he looks and is the frailer of the two. The severities he endured at the North Pole account for this. Four years' continuous residence in that

land of snow and ice, so vividly depicted by Captain Nares, were endured; and surely now, in this his last year or two, he will not be allowed to pass away unhonoured and neglected. This is the first appeal that was ever made on his behalf. I write this with his full consent, and I trust a sufficient degree of interest will be awakened, and that something will be done for him. He would be glad to know if any of his old comrades are alive, or if any of the heroic Ross family are to the fore. He is a native of Kinghorn, in Fifeshire’.

**‘Death of an Arctic Explorer’, *The Evening News*
(Portsmouth) 1 June 1893**

Fleet-Paymaster James Joseph Rutter, R.N. (retired), whose death has just been announced in the 75th year of his age, entered the Royal Navy in 1842 as a clerk, and was in 1849 appointed clerk-in-charge of the North Star, 22, Master-Commander James Saunders, one of the vessels despatched for the succour of Sir John Franklin’s expedition. The North Star left the Nore on May 19th for Baffin’s Bay, and from July to September lay in the drifting ice in a position of almost hourly peril. She then went into winter quarters in Wolstenholme Sound. From October to February there was no daylight, and during part of that time a temperature of 63 1/2 degrees below zero was experienced. The ship did not get away again until August 1st. On the 21st of that month the search vessels Lady Franklin and Sophia, and on the following day the Felix, Commander Phillips, were spoken, and shortly afterwards a store of provisions for the missing ships was landed on Wollaston Island. The leader of the expedition, in his report to the Admiralty, wrote: - ‘Whilst discharging the provisions and other stores I was highly pleased with the zealous and active part Mr. James J. Rutter, the clerk in charge, took in assisting as far as possible the fulfillment of that important duty.... I have had great reason to be pleased with him, and would strongly recommend him to the favourable consideration of their Lordships for his promotion’. The ship returned to Spithead in September, 1850, and a few days later Mr. Rutter, whose valuable drawings of Wolstenholme Sound, North Star Bay, &c. [now in the Scott Polar Research Institute], had by that time reached the Admiralty was promoted to be Paymaster. His last service afloat was in the Phoebe on the North American Station. He retired in 1869, and in 1886 attained the rank in which he died.

**‘An Arctic Commemoration. To the Editor of the Standard’, *The Standard* (London)
22 November 1894**

Sir, – Next May will be the fiftieth anniversary of the departure from here of the Erebus and Terror, under Sir John Franklin, for the North-West Passage – never to return.

It appeared to me that it might be suitably commemorated by a meeting of Old Arctics, and all interested in the subject, to do honour to the memory of those

gallant, ill-fated men – martyrs in the cause of national duty, and who, in the late Sir John Richardson’s words, ‘forged the last link with their lives’. Other anniversaries – particularly of the gory battlefield – are kept; why not, then, those relating to the gallant deeds of Arctic explorers, whose warfare is, not to destroy life, but to advance our general knowledge?

Lately I suggested this to the Royal Geographical Society, and have received a courteous reply from the esteemed President, Mr. C.R. Markham – himself an Old Arctic – cordially endorsing my idea, and promising to try to organise such a commemoration.

Of course, many of those engaged on the arduous search for our missing brethren are known to him; but several more have yet to be found. Thus, I venture to hope the Press will kindly notice the subject, so that surviving members may send in their names and addresses, and, if to me, they will be forwarded to any Committee formed.

I must confess it seems to me astonishing that, as a maritime nation of high *prestige*, we leave our explorers, who really are the pioneers of enlightenment and commerce, to perish as some have, or to be ignored by a generation reaping the benefit of their persevering and perilous labours. Other nations seek their gallant adventurers, when missing, by ceaseless efforts to recover them, or positively ascertain their fate, no matter what the distance or length of time. Then, if death has overtaken them in the path of duty, their remains, even to the minutest fragments, are reverently gathered up and brought thousands of miles – as America nobly did to her heroic sons – and interred with more than ordinary honour. Hence, I venture to urge that whatsoever we can do now with reference to the memory of those brave dead who perished in the last Franklin Expedition should be by a commemoration on the fiftieth anniversary of the sailing.

I suggest that the Painted Hall, Greenwich, would be a suitable place for any reverent celebration, or, if not there, then have the Foudroyant [famous as a gunship during the Napoleonic Wars] – as the Resolute was unpatriotically broken up – moored off the chivalrous Bellot’s monument for the purpose. This old ship of Nelson’s (himself an Arctic in his youth) could be well adapted, though the Painted Hall, I fancy, is best. Anyhow, let the Royal Hospital School Boys also attend, and be stirred up to further emulation by seeing some of those gallant Naval officers who had, long ago, been pupils there.

In my letter to the Royal Geographical Society, I further suggested a new Expedition being sent to the North-West to sail on the same dates as the Erebus and Terror did; but I fear that any hope of Government doing this, in our present sordid age, is vain.

One more object I have long sought to bring about; and that is to found an ‘Explorers’ Institute’, which should be composed exclusively of *bonâ-fide* explorers by land or sea. To it might be attached, or made subsidiary, ‘Homes’ (not almshouses) for broken-down veterans who, in some form or other, and often at great cost to

THE FRANKLIN EXPEDITION.

DEATH OF A QUARTER-MASTER'S WIDOW.



Fig. 1. Margaret Bell, widow of William Bell, Quarter-Master on *Erebus*.

themselves in purse, toil, and health, have upheld their native flag by carrying it into previously unknown or difficult regions. I conceive this might be made a practical outcome of any commemoration with reference to the North-West Passage martyrs.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant.

W. PARKER SNOW.

1, Victoria-road, Bexley Heath, Kent, November 20.

'The Franklin Expedition. Death of a Quarter-Master's Widow', *The Dundee Courier* 6 April 1895

The above is a portrait of Margaret Bell [Fig. 1], eighty-eight years of age, widow of the late Quarter-Master William Bell, who was lost in the ill-fated Franklin Expedition some forty-nine years ago. By the death of Mrs Bell one of the last of the widows of the crew of the vessels lost in the Arctic regions at that time has been removed. It is interesting to recall that the services of four Dundee seamen were accepted in connection with the expedition – Bell, Kennedy, and Daniel Arthur, quarter-masters; and William Shanks, able seaman. Bell sailed in the *Erebus*, the vessel in which Sir John Franklin himself shipped. Prior to his selection for this dangerous and, as it proved, more than risky honour, Bell had served on board the whaler *Alexander*, whose timbers have long since gone to swell the wreckage left in the northern latitudes. Mrs Bell was brimful of memories in connection with the adventures of whalers in the early thirties.

'Aberdeen and the Franklin Expedition', *Aberdeen Journal* 12 June 1895

The articles which appeared in our columns last week with regard to the connection of Aberdeen with the Franklin Expedition and with the various expeditions sent in search of the ill-fated *Erebus* and *Terror*, have been the means of eliciting the fact that, in addition to the two Aberdeen men [James Reid, ice-master on the

Erebus and Alexander MacDonald, assistant-surgeon on the *Terror*] who were stated to have sailed with Sir John Franklin on his disastrous voyage, there was a third, viz., Josephus Gaiter [also spelled 'Geater'], whose widow is still resident in this city, and whose brother, Mr Frederick Gaiter, tailor, is also living in our midst. Mrs Gaiter, who resides at 20^{1/2} Albion Street, called at our office yesterday with reference to the articles, and gave us some interesting particulars as to her husband. The old lady – she is now 81 – has a wonderfully retentive memory, and recalls incidents of the almost forgotten past with the utmost distinctness. Her husband, she stated, was the son of Richard Gaiter, a native of Berkshire, who enlisted in the 9th Regiment of Foot Guards. While in the army he became servant to Captain Duff, brother of Colonel Duff of Fetteresse, and both were taken prisoners when fighting under the Duke of York at Ostend. Ultimately, both master and man obtained their release. Proceeding to London Gaiter got employment in a warehouse, and while there he married. Josephus was the eldest son of the marriage, and was born at Whitechapel. When only six weeks old his parents came north to Stonehaven, where the old guardsman had, through the influence of Colonel Duff, a brother of his old master, obtained the joint offices of keeper of the county jail and messenger-at-arms. Josephus spent his boyhood in Stonehaven, but having a taste for seafaring life, he was apprenticed on board the *Glentann* – a brig belonging to Aberdeen which was employed in the American trade. On the completion of his apprenticeship, the young sailor secured his parchment as mate, and in that capacity he served under old Captain Campbell – as he was familiarly designated in seafaring circles – on board the *Duke of Richmond*, trading between Inverness, Aberdeen, and Leith. He also served for a considerable time as second mate of the *North Star*, one of the traders plying between Inverness and London. While trading from Aberdeen Josephus met his wife, Mary Ann Duncan, daughter of Captain Duncan, who had long experience as master of one of the trading smacks between this port and London. Ten years of happy married life had been spent by the couple, and four children had been born to them, when, induced by the adventure which the expedition promised, and the pecuniary inducements held out, Gaiter volunteered for service on board the *Erebus*, and left Aberdeen for London on the 15th of April, 1845. "That was the last that I saw of him," added the old lady, with a sorrowful shake of her head. On the 15th of May, the ill-fated vessels *Erebus* and *Terror* sailed, and Mrs Gaiter remembers, as if it were yesterday, seeing the ships pass through Aberdeen Bay on their disastrous voyage. The last that was heard of Gaiter was the news contained in a letter written by himself from Greenland to his brother Frederick. In that communication he stated that he was quite well, and very comfortable. Sir John, he added, was exceedingly kind, and the crew liked him very much. "The months dragged wearily, wearily," said Mrs Gaiter, "when we heard no word of the expedition, but still we hoped

on that news of the safety of the explorers would be brought us.” This hope was strengthened when Captain Penny set sail in the *Fox* on the voyage of discovery [Francis Leopold McClintock commanded the *Fox*]. Lady Franklin came to Aberdeen to see the *Fox* sail, and there was an entertainment on board the vessel on the night preceding her departure. “Well do I remember, taking my lassie’s han’ – she was a wee bairnie then – and going to the lady, in answer to her wish to see the wives and families of any of the crew.” Lady Franklin lived in Mrs Yule’s lodgings in Union Street, and “when,” continued Mrs Gaiter, “I was shown into her presence, she spoke kindly and expressed the hope that we might have our dear ones back again in at least three years.” In answer to a question, Mrs Gaiter stated that application had been made long ago to Government with a view to getting aid for the widows and orphans of the men who lost their lives in the expedition, but no help was ever given, and during her widowhood of fifty years Mrs Gaiter has toiled hard to obtain an honest living, and bring up her family decently. Two of her family are dead, but her daughter Susan, who is employed in a warehouse in the city, maintains the old lady. Her son Joseph is a member of the permanent staff of the 3rd Battalion Gordon Highlanders, among whom he has been since boyhood. He resides in barracks in King Street, and is well known as a prominent member of the band of the battalion.

‘In Search of Sir John Franklin. A Tredegar Survivor’, *Western Mail* (Cardiff) 27 December 1898

Our Tredegar reporter has had an interesting interview with one of the survivors of the expeditions which were sent in search of Sir John Franklin and the ill-fated crews of the *Erebus* and *Terror* in the Arctic regions. This interesting personage is John Hieel, who resides with his genial wife in a homely cot in Union-street, Tredegar, where he has made his abode for the last thirty years.

Hieel, although seventy-six years of age, and in spite of the hardships he has gone through, is still active, and, beyond being slightly deaf, possesses all his faculties, and exhibits splendid intelligence and an extraordinary memory. He is a native of Frome, Somersetshire, and has followed the profession of the sea from his youth. The very suggestion of relating his experiences appeared to revive this old Arctic veteran, and his eye sparkled and he straightened his bent form as he proceeded with a brusqueness characteristic of an old salt to tell his tale.

‘And so you have been in the Arctic regions?’

‘Aye, and that I have’, said he. ‘I was there in three expeditions extending over about six years’.

It transpired that Hieel joined the crew of the Investigator in 1847, then being fitted out for the Arctic regions, in search of Sir John Franklin. Robert M’Lure (since Sir Robert Le Mesurier M’Lure) was first Lieutenant, and Francis Leopold M’Clintock (since Admiral Sir Francis

Leopold M’Clintock) second lieutenant. With this expedition Hieel was nineteen months in the Polar regions as first-class stoker. His second expedition was on board the *Intrepid*, under the command of Captain Francis Leopold M’Clintock. His third visit to the Arctic regions was on board the *Resolute*, again with Captain M’Clintock, and on this occasion the ships had to be abandoned and the crews brought home in the *North Star*.

‘What proof have you that you were attached to these expeditions?’

‘Here’s my proof’, said the old man, extracting an ancient-looking piece of blue paper from a small tin case, and handing it for the inspection of the pressman with pardonable pride. This official-looking blue paper was a certificate from Sir Francis M’Clintock, and ran as follows:-

‘John Hieel has served with me in the Arctic regions for about six years, and has throughout served in the most prominent sledge journeys. The last one under me, 1,200 miles in extent, has seriously injured his health, and almost cost him his life. I found his one of the most zealous, praiseworthy, and excellent of my picked men, and one who is fully and thoroughly entitled to any benefits or compensation his services can bestow upon him. – (Signed), F.L. M’Clintock, commander H.M.S. *Intrepid*, tender to *Resolute*.

These sledge journeys constituted the most trying experiences of the expeditions. They were greatly lengthened, as experience increased, from 40 days in the first expedition to 80 in the second and 105 in the third, and Hieel asserts that on one occasion they were 120 days on the ice. These were among the longest continuous journeys of the kind ever accomplished. And it must be remembered that the sledges were drawn over the ice by the crews at an average rate of about ten miles a day, dogs not being requisitioned on those occasions. For such intense and long-standing labour more than ordinary endurance and resolution were necessary.

‘What was the length of the expeditions?’ put in the interviewer.

‘The first extended to nineteen months; in the second we spent two winters and a summer: and the length of the third was about the same. It was’ continued Hieel, ‘while in the *Resolute* that we picked up a bottle containing papers near Melville Island, which informed us of the whereabouts of M’Lure, with the Investigator. M’Lure and a sledge party afterwards joined us in our winter quarters’.

Suddenly rising from his arm-chair, the veteran brought from an adjoining room a large photograph, elaborately framed in gilt. ‘Here’s a thing I am proud of’, said he. It was an autograph photo of M’Clintock. ‘Sir Francis M’Clintock sent me that himself from Halifax, Nova Scotia. Ah! he was a splendid man, and I would love to see him once again. He was a good Christian man. Oh! yes. I have seen him since we were in the Arctic regions – once on board the *Black Eagle*, and once at the United Club House, Pall Mall’. The old man was now

in a reminiscent mood, and continued: – ‘I occasionally slept alongside of him in the tent. He treated the men with the greatest respect. And went through precisely the same hardships as ourselves. His letters are splendid’.

‘Does Sir Francis write to you sometimes, then?’

‘Oh! that he does. I have had several letters from him, and I think a lot of them, too. I very often look at them. He writes as if he were one of ourselves’.

‘What sort of a place are the Arctic regions?’

‘It’s a dreary place, I can tell you. There are icebergs there 800 and 900 feet high floating on the surface of the water. We sometimes fastened our ships to them. In some parts animals are numerous, such as musk-ox – a kind of small wild bull – foxes, wild, ducks, and, of course, Polar bears’.

‘I suppose you went on hunting expeditions?’

‘Yes. I shot a deer on one occasion; but they are poor animals – not enough of fat on them to grease one’s boots. They came in very useful though, for a change of food. I shot plenty of bears in and out of the water. They are big cowards, and will not attack a party of men, but they will tackle a man when he is alone. I saw M’Clintock shoot a bear one morning by the tent door; but he had to put two shots into him before he finished him’ [McClintock had this bear stuffed and donated it to the Natural History Museum, Dublin]

‘What was your experience of the cold?’

‘Oh!’ replied the old sailor, with a shrug, ‘it froze everything. The rum, which was several degrees above proof, became as thick as treacle. When we woke in the morning our eyelids were frozen, and we had to thaw them before we could open them. We wore sealskin clothing, and our boots had a cork sole inserted between the leather to protect our feet from the frost. We had great difficulty with the water. Each man was allowed half a pint a day, and in a small vessel next the flannel we wore; but even then it occasionally froze’.

‘How about your food?’

‘Well! that was all frozen stuff, and we warmed it up by means of consolidated rum several degrees above proof. Camphor was put into it to prevent the men from drinking it’.

‘A very necessary precaution, very likely’, ejaculated the reporter.

‘Aye, indeed’, said the old man. ‘When I went out in the Investigator, we carried coal on the sledges to cook our food, but it was too heavy, and we afterwards took rum with us. Half-a-pint of rum was enough to cook food for ten men. We had a peculiar way of dealing with pea-soup. We would make a quantity, sew it up in canvas bags, and allow it to freeze. We then chopped it up with an axe and warmed it up as we used it’.

Asked about the natural phenomena seen in the Arctic regions, Hieel said that about this time of the year there were 70 days of twilight day and night. About the middle of the summer the sun shone at twelve o’clock at night – just rose and dipped’. At that time we did not know the day from the night. In fact, we men often lost all record of

time and could not reckon the days, but our captain kept a chronometer under the armpit to keep it from freezing’.

‘Did you have any difficulty in amusing yourselves?’

‘Not at all. We played snowballing, cutting holes in the snow and ice, building snow walls, making snow men, and banking up the ships. All this was done for exercise. It would not do for us to stay below. We paid visits from one ship to another, just as people go visiting from house to house. We had a theatre rigged up on board the Resolute, and we made up costumes and performed plays. I remember one play was something about recruiting, and we used strips of coloured paper for ribbons. I have done a bit of real recruiting since then though. Christmas was kept up in those regions, and pretty lively, too. We even had the plum pudding.

‘What trophies did you bring from the Polar regions?’

‘There is very little to be got there except skins. We brought some of them. But, look here’, said the veteran, reaching a formidable-looking scissors from the wall; ‘here’s a thing that has been out with me in all my travels. Ah!’ said he, gazing fondly at the scissors. ‘I have cut Admiral Sir Francis M’Clintock’s hair with this. He came to me one day, and said he wanted me to cut his hair’. I told him I was not an expert at the job, and I had never done anything of the sort before. ‘Never mind; obey orders. John’, said he, and I did it. But that was the first and the last time I ever did a bit of barbering’, said John, with a mischievous twinkle in his eye, which did not speak well for the tonsorial effect on Sir Francis’s hair.

‘How did you manage about your toilet in those cold parts?’

‘We did very little of that. Water was too scarce. We rubbed our hands and faces with snow. Only once I remember Sir Francis M’Clintock wash his face with water up there, and he handed me the water to throw away. What do you think I did with it? I went behind the tent and drank it, and felt pretty glad to get it. Tobacco? Oh! we had as much as we liked. Lady Franklin almost piled up the ships with it’.

‘Then you did not find the whereabouts of Sir John Franklin and his crew?’

‘Not during those expeditions, but Sir Francis M’Clintock went out in the Fox and discovered all about them. Unfortunately, I was on leave at the time, or I would have been with that expedition’.

‘Have you been to any other parts of the world?’

‘Oh! yes. I was with Sir George H. Richards, K.C.R., for three years when he was conducting a survey of Vancouver Island and British Columbia. In 1841 I was on board a Government ship on the Congo catching slavers. We were lucky in getting hold of several. We call it ‘lucky’ because there is prize money in the business. The slave ships were taken into Sierra Leone and burnt’.

Having listened to the interesting old traveler for some time longer then the pressman bade him farewell, his parting remark being, ‘I have only one more voyage to make’.

**‘Death of an Arctic Veteran’, *The Morning Post*
(London) 6 February 1899**

The funeral took place at New Brompton, Chatham, on Saturday of Cornelius James Hulott, formerly a petty officer in the Royal Navy. He had had a somewhat adventurous career. His father was a man of colour, a native of the West Indies, who had been a ship’s steward, and his mother was a Sheerness woman. At the age of thirteen he joined a frigate and sailed round the world. He served in the China War of 1841, and later volunteered as one of the crew of the *Investigator*, which was sent out to the Arctic regions in search of Sir John Franklin. He had some hairbreadth escapes on that Expedition, of which he was one of the few survivors remaining. On returning to England he worked as a rigger in Sheerness Dockyard, and afterwards became instructor to the boys on the Cornwallis training ship. Subsequently he worked for twenty years in Chatham Dockyard. Retiring on a pension, he built a cottage and named it Arctic Villa. He resided there until his death, at the age of 69.

‘A Survivor of Franklin Relief Expedition’, *Dundee Evening Telegraph* 7 April 1899

Our Montreal correspondent writes by last mail:- Some weeks ago the Rev. W.H. Adams, Orono, Ontario, applied to the Right Hon. Joseph Chamberlain for the award of a pension to Mr Henry Gauen, of Ivanhoe, Ontario, who is, so far as is known, the only survivor of the crew of H.M.S. *Investigator*, which sailed from Plymouth on January 20th, 1850, in search of Sir John Franklin. On March 23d he received letters from the Lords of the Admiralty and from Ottawa, which state that a pension at one shilling a day for life was awarded to Mr Gauen on the first day of March, and that the necessary steps will be taken to enable him to draw this pension.

Mr Gauen has lived for a number of years in Ivanhoe, but four dreadful Arctic winters on short rations have left their mark upon him. He is the owner of an octagon-shaped medal, bearing the figure of an ice-bound ship and the legend – ‘For Arctic Discoveries’. As the last of the discoverers of the North-West Passage he is the only British subject now living who has sailed all round the American continent. [*Investigator* was abandoned at Mercy Bay in June 1853 and its crew transferred to *Resolute* and then *North Star* which brought them back to London. On the basis of entering the Arctic from the Pacific, and leaving it from the Atlantic, McClure was able to claim for himself and his crew the £10,000 prize money awarded by Parliament for the discovery of a northwest passage]

**‘The Newport Veteran’, *Western Mail* (Cardiff)
August 18, 1899**

John Robinson, who died on Wednesday at 8, Portland-street, Newport, at the age of 74 had had a remarkable career. A native of Tenby, he went to sea whilst very young, and in the year 1845 he was wrecked from the

brig *Mary Gray*, of Peterhead (which had been doing some whaling as well as general cargo carrying), and was cast upon the Falkland Islands. Here he spent about five years in the service of Governor Moody in sealing and hunting. In 1848 her Majesty’s barque *Plover* put into the Falklands and asked for volunteers to go up to Behring Sea and Straits in the Government search for the remains of Sir John Franklin. The barque had rounded Cape Horn, but was short of men. Robinson joined her as a volunteer, and spent two years and a half in the ice regions of the North. He used to dwell with much enjoyment upon his adventures in the Polar regions, and of the hardships that were endured. They, however, had a great time at Great Bear Lake, where they had fish and dry deer. On many occasions, however, they were harassed by Esquimaux, and Mr. Robinson had no great opinion of these Northrons [for the background to this inter-ethnic conflict see Bockstoce 1988]. He considered them crafty people, and related a story of their cunning in the art of warfare. The British sailors used, as a rule, to sleep at night in sets on the land, but had to keep a constant watch on the aborigines. On one occasion when the sailors had set up a log barricade before settling themselves for the night the natives almost immediately erected just opposite them a barricade of double logs with shingle packed between. On another occasion Robinson’s own prowess put the fear of God into the Esquimaux. He successfully tackled a bear single-handed, and the fame of it spread through all the countryside. As the men were one morning going to their boats [some] natives came after them. The commander was not so fleet as the rest of the men, and was in great peril, when Robinson intervening got between his commander and the enemy and defiled them. They recognized the bear-killer, and concluded that discretion was the better part of valour. He and some others of the party returned to England in a ship called the *Prince of Wales*, arriving in London in the October of 1851. Not long after that Mr. Robinson settled at Newport, where he became a lock-master of the Old Dock and continued in that occupation until about six years ago, when he was pensioned. A cancerous growth occurred in the mouth, which with the operation performed six weeks ago led to his death.

‘The Franklin Expedition. An Interesting Link’, *The Dundee Courier* 31 August 1899

By the death of John Ramsay, who was buried on Wednesday in the South Leith Churchyard, the seaport town has lost another familiar figure. The peculiar interest attaching to ‘Old Jack’ Ramsay arose from his connection, humble though it was, with the search for Franklin, the great navigator, and his brave companions, who sacrificed their lives in completing the discovery of the North-West passage more than 50 years ago. The Ramsays hailed originally from Berwick, but Jack was born and bred in Leith, and on the death of his father inherited a considerable sum. In many ways, however, Ramsay was a

typical sailor, and his patrimony vanished in the orthodox style. In 1849 he enlisted in the Navy, and was drafted to H.M.S. *Resolute*. Sir John Franklin, with the *Erebus* and *Terror* – 138 persons all told [actually 129 men after Greenland] – had sailed four years previously on his ill-starred voyage of discovery and survey. John Ramsay was a seaman in the *Resolute*, in the expedition which sailed from Woolwich in 1852 in search of Franklin. The ships of the expedition were frozen in, and in 1854 the command was given that they be abandoned, and the crews took to the ice. In after years ‘Old Jack’ never wearied of recounting the dangers and the difficulties of that awful time. On reaching home, ‘Old Jack’ found work in connection with the Customs, and afterwards joined the merchant service. Despite these years of battle with the cruel hardships of the frozen north, Ramsay had no thought of applying for a pension, and when, twenty-eight years later, he was induced to do so, he was confronted with an unexpected and almost insuperable obstacle – the Admiralty insisted upon him proving his identity. Mainly through the kind endeavours of Dr Mitchell, the parish minister, and Mr Cox, Ramsay’s oldest friend, the difficulty was surmounted, and a pension of 1s a day allowed. This he enjoyed for 17 years, and received, moreover, a slight gratuity from the Trinity House people [a pilotage authority]. Despite the privations he underwent, and the permanent injury he sustained, Ramsay enjoyed wonderful health all his days. He took ill on Sunday last, and an operation was contemplated, but on the following forenoon the end came, and it was peaceful. Ramsay was twice married, and is survived only by his step-daughter, with whom he lived. He died at the ripe age of 81.

‘Tale of the Arctic’, *The Dundee Courier* 21 January 1903

At her residence in Downfield, on Saturday last, there passed away at the ripe age of four-score Mrs Mollison, who for nearly half a century carried on a prosperous business in Union Street, Dundee, and who was widely known and respected in the city. The death of this estimable lady revives an interesting, if melancholy, reminiscence.

A native of Laurencekirk, nee Macdonald, her only brother was a distinguished medical student of Edinburgh University, and, after taking his degree in 1838, entered the British Navy as a surgeon, and served on several foreign stations.

During the earlier decade of the century the question of a North-West Passage was the subject of much debate in nautical and geographical circles. Many attempts had been made to discover a navigable waterway between the Atlantic and the Pacific by way of the Arctic regions, and although some interesting facts, scientific and geographical, had been added to the sum of human knowledge, the great problem was still unsolved in 1845. In that year the British Government determined to make a farther effort,

and an expedition, consisting of two vessels, the *Erebus* and the *Terror*, was fitted out under Sir John Franklin, which, it was hoped, would succeed in accomplishing the task.

Having just returned from a visit to the Holy Land, Dr Macdonald volunteered his services as one of the medical staff, and was appointed to the *Terror*, the second ship of the expedition, which sailed from Sheerness on the 26th of May, 1845. The ships were last seen by a whaler in Baffin’s Bay on the 26th of June, and then the veil dropped over the hapless company, which was not to be lifted for fifteen anxious years.

As the seasons passed and no news was received of or from the explorers, the public excitement became intense, and expedition after expedition was dispatched in the hope of reaching and succouring the lost ones, or, at least, in wresting from the dark and dreary solitudes of the ice-bound North the secret of their fate. But in vain. Not till 1859 was there found any definite trace of the unfortunates. In that year Captain (afterwards Sir Leopold) M’Clintock, who had been sent out two years previously in the *Fox*, came upon the trail. We cannot here follow the details of M’Clintock’s investigation. Suffice it to say that he found proof that the object of the expedition had been so far accomplished; they had demonstrated the existence of a north-west passage, and at the same time its impracticability; that Sir John Franklin had died in 1847; that the ships had been ultimately abandoned, and the crews had endeavoured to reach the Great Fish River, where they had all perished.

From the natives were obtained many relics of the expedition, and amongst other articles recovered and brought home were a silver medal belonging to Dr Macdonald, gained by him when a student at Edinburgh University, and bearing his name, also several of his table appointments, on which his initials were engraved. The latter are now in the museum of Greenwich Hospital, but the medal was retained and piously treasured as a priceless memento by the lady now deceased [this is now in the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich].

The medal was forwarded to Mrs Mollison by Lady Franklin, who sent a note in her own handwriting, ‘With Lady Franklin’s assurances of her warmest sympathy’. It may be recalled that Lady Franklin assisted greatly in the fitting out of the *Fox*, which brought home the relics of the ill-fated expedition.

‘An Arctic Veteran’, *Dundee Evening Post* 10 September 1903

How many still remain with us of the pioneers of Arctic discovery who in the middle of the last century set the world admiring their plucky attempts to discover the allusive north-west passage – and to discover one another? The oldest Arctic explorer now living appears to be Mr John Potvine, who is now one of Dulwich’s halest and sturdiest residents. Mr Potvine lacks but a few months to complete his eightieth year. His yarns of the

time when he sailed in the *North Star*, when she first went to the succour of Sir John Franklin in 1849, show that Arctic work in those days was carried on in a way very different from what the manner is now. He remembers how the men used to light their pipes from the all-night sun with lens of ice rubbed into proper shape by their hands.

‘Last of Them. Interesting Veteran’s Death at Dartmouth’, *The Western Times* (Exeter) 12 December 1903

A few days ago there died at Clarence-street, Dartmouth, an aged naval pensioner, named Robert Wilkinson, who was both a survivor from the Franklin relief expedition of 1851, and a Crimean veteran, honours that fell to the lot of very few. Probably he is the last of those who volunteered to go in search of Sir John Franklin in the *North Star*, a vessel specially built for service in the Arctic regions. The ship was away over three years, and when she returned in 1854, her crew had a harrowing tale of sufferings and privations to tell.

Though they did not succeed in finding the missing explorer they were feted to the highest, for they had done their best and had endured much in the quest.

Wilkinson was then a seaman in the British Navy, and soon after his return he was sent for service in the Mediterranean, and served through the Crimean war.

At the close he came out of the Navy, and was for some years in the dockyard. He retired on a pension, which was augmented considerably on account of his services with the relief expedition.

These particulars were given to our representative by Mrs. Hancock, the deceased’s daughter, with whom he resided at Dartmouth. She had forgotten the name of the ship in which the expedition sailed, and the deceased’s papers and co-documents were not in her possession.

Fortunately, however, she had a framed copy of the prayer used “by the sledging parties” on each occasion they left the ship while she was wintering in the ice, and that had been signed and dated by Wilkinson and bore the name of the ship “*North Star*,” as well as the dates 1851–1854.

Mrs. Hancock added that she believed it to be a fact that her father was the last survivor of that memorable expedition, and that many of those who returned were so affected by their privations that they went mad.

Wilkinson’s experience must have been almost unique, and it is given to few towns to have in its midst a man who is both a survivor of the Franklin search party and a Crimean veteran.

‘Another Franklin Survivor’, *Portsmouth Evening News* 16 December 1903

Yet another survivor of the Franklin Relief Expedition! Mr. Charles Wearn, a retired Gunner, R.N., of Lincoln-road, Fratton, writes with reference to the recent notification of the death of the “last survivor”: “I think I

am entitled to call myself a survivor of the expedition. I volunteered, and was sent to the Arctic, serving in the *North Star* in 1853 and 1854, then under the command of Captain Pullen. I still have a vivid recollection of the hardships we experienced out there. I hold the medal for the Arctic”.

‘Franklin Search Expeditions’, *Portsmouth Evening News* 18 December 1903

A few days ago we, in common with other papers, announced the death of the ‘last survivor’ of the Franklin Search Expedition. Since then several of the survivors resident in this locality have made themselves known to us, and the latest of them is Mr. David Bargery, a chief gunner, R.N., who is now resident in Beach Farm-road. He was in the *Rattlesnake*, which engaged in the search for the ill-fated expedition, and which wintered in the ice in 1853–54. Another survivor is Mr. John Stanley, a retired carpenter, now living at Stamshaw. He was a member of the same ship’s company. According to the latest Navy List, the navigating officer and clerk of the *Rattlesnake* are still living, and there are probably many more survivors than have communicated with us. There are annual dinners to Crimean and Mutiny veterans. Why not also arrange a dinner to the veterans of the Franklin Search Expedition? ‘Peace hath its victories no less renowned than war’, and we are sure the gatherings of these old salts will be full of interest.

‘Was in Franklin Relief Expedition. Death of Veteran Scottish Explorer’, *Nottingham Evening Post* 27 January 1904

Mr. David Porteous, a Scotsman, who was medical officer to Sir John Ross’ expedition in 1850 to the Arctic in search of Sir John Franklin, died at Middleton, St George, Darlington, this morning at an advanced age.

In early manhood the deceased was an assistant surgeon in the navy, and had medals for service in the Arctic regions, the Baltic and Crimean Campaigns, and the Indian Mutiny. For thirty years he was a country practitioner at Middleton.

‘Mumby – Veteran Skipper’s Adventures’, *The Lincolnshire Chronicle* (Lincoln) 3 June 1904

An interesting career, marked by many moving incidents and perilous adventures, has been that of Captain Rehoboth Robinson, a retired master mariner, of Boston, now living at Skirbeck. Despite his 69 years and the fact that he has been nine times wrecked (three times in his own vessel), lost his wife, who was drowned at sea, himself sustained a broken leg, injured spine, and other misfortunes and illnesses, and undergone two winters in the Arctic regions, Captain Robinson is still hale and hearty, and sufficiently active to have mastered the mysteries of the cycle, which he rides with evident pleasure. Interested in Captain Robinson’s career and the death of a survivor of the expedition sent in search of Franklin, a corres-

pondent paid a visit to the old gentleman, and gleaned from him the entertaining story of his life. The veteran was born at Mumby Chapel in 1831, and at 13 became a cabin boy on a coaster, a brig in the Goole and London trade, and out of Hull, afterwards joining the American trade from Glasgow. Having been practically all over the globe, he, in 1852, threw in his lot with Sir Edward Belcher, who fitted five ships at Woolwich for the search of the explorer Franklin. He was the youngest man in the expedition, and remained two years in the frozen North. Out of the 220 strong comprising the crews only three remain – Admiral Sir R.V. Hamilton, G.C.B., Admiral Sir Leopold McClintock, K.C.B., and Captain Robinson. During the search the expedition fell in with the “Investigator,” commanded by Captain McClure whose crew was rescued and brought home. Returning from this expedition, Capt. Robinson served in the transport service during the Russian war. Commencing coasting again he, a few years later, was wrecked in the brig “Allen,” between the Humber and Yarmouth Roads. As a result he was an invalid for several months, and went to Boston a cripple. Getting better, he became partner in the purchase of a vessel, but she went down with a cargo of wheat. He had a craft called the “Spring” for 15 years, and afterwards a new ship, the “Intrepid,” which was run down in the Irish Sea, when his wife was drowned, and the captain himself very much injured. Once more convalescent he purchased the “Caledonia” but after two or three years he retired to Skirbeck. Captain Robinson is, adds the correspondent, the proud possessor of a handsome silver medal, presented to him “For Arctic discoveries, 1818–1855.” On one side of the medal is the bust of Queen Victoria, and on the reverse a representation of an ice-bound ship, with a number of explorers dragging the sledge over the floes. During his adventurous history Captain Robinson has sailed in over 100 ships, rising from a cabin boy to master-mariner and shipowner. He has on many occasions of danger distinguished himself by acts of promptitude and bravery, and has saved as many as 40 persons from drowning.

‘Arctic Veteran Passes away at Portsea’, *Portsmouth Evening News* 28 December 1904

The death has taken place at Portsea, at his residence, 86, St. George’s-square, of (it is believed) the last survivor in Portsmouth of the Franklin Relief Expedition of the early fifties, in the person of John William Smith. He went out in the North Star, which served as a depot ship to the four search vessels, and received the white ribboned Arctic medal for his service in the arduous commission.

Mr. Smith joined the Service in 1849 as a second-class boy, and was at once drafted to the old Duke of Wellington. In her he went to the Baltic on active service against the Russians, and for this he gained his first of six medals, being the youngest in the Fleet to be honoured. In nearly all his commissions he saw active work, and in addition to the Arctic and Baltic medals he gained

the Crimean medal and clasp for work with the Naval Brigade in the trenches before Sevastopol, the China medal, and the medal for long service and good conduct.

From the time he joined the Royal Navy, in 1848, to 1871, when he retired as boatswain’s mate, he never had a day’s sickness, as is shown by the blanks on his certificate, not the least remarkable features of his career.

Mr. Smith passed away on Christmas Eve. The funeral takes place at Kingston Cemetery on Thursday afternoon.

‘An Arctic Veteran’, *Yorkshire Telegraph and Star* (Sheffield) 1 January 1908

There is now living at Greenwich probably the last survivor of the many men who between 1849 and 1857, while searching for Sir John Franklin, practically charted the Arctic archipelago.

The man’s name is Cartwright, and he is 85 years of age. He says he remembers seeing Lieut. Bellot start on the journey in the Arctic which cost that gallant officer his life, and says it was himself that gathered the stones from the three graves found on Beechey Island, the first trace found of Franklin’s route. The stones are now in the Greenwich Museum.

In 1853 he shipped on the Phoenix as leading stoker, when she went to the Arctic, under Capt. Englefield [sic], to help in the search for Franklin. His anecdotes of the staunch old tub are very interesting. The bumping of the ice used to throw her propeller shaft out of its bed and dislocate the converted gearing in an alarming way.

“You might say we were never off duty. We were always watching her to see what would bust next. You know, we used to blow down the boilers every hour.” Cartwright also possesses the Crimean medal.

‘A Link with Franklin’, *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* (Exeter) 13 April 1909

An adventurous career was that of Robert Slessor, who has just died at Peterhead, aged 98. He three times suffered shipwreck, and took part nearly sixty years ago, in one of the expeditions which visited the Arctic regions in search of Sir John Franklin. Although successful in discovering the spot where Franklin wintered, the expedition did not accomplish its main object [this was the multi-vessel expedition commanded by Horatio Austin, 1850–1851]. Slessor made several voyages in a whaler, and later became a pilot, witnessing the tidal wave of 1849, which swept over Keith Inch in Peterhead Harbour, causing the loss of 15 lives and doing much damage to property.

‘Link with Franklin Expedition’, *Dundee Evening Telegraph* 26 October 1909

By the death of Miss Reid, Harbour Terrace, Wick, aged 75, a link with the Franklin Expedition has been severed. Miss Reid was for many years stewardess in the service of the North of Scotland Steam Shipping Company, from which position she retired twelve years ago. She was of a retiring nature, and was highly respected in the

community. Her father sailed as ice master in the Erebus with Sir John Franklin during his attempt to discover the North-West Passage in May 1845. When an expedition was started in search of Franklin in 1848 Miss Reid's brother, being requested by Lady Franklin, joined the search party. It was not, however, till 1859 that traces of the expedition were found by McClintock. Mr Reid's watch and Testament, which are now with other articles in the museum at Greenwich, were found at that time.

'The "Search for Franklin". The Last Survivor's Story. Interview with Henry Stone', *The Newcastle Daily Journal*, (Newcastle on Tyne) 16 August 1910

I am eighty-six years of age, and my friends tell me that it is almost impossible to believe that I am more than fifty-six, so tenderly has age and time dealt with me. I need not say that I am very glad it is so, nor that I am proud of being even now as active, healthy, and brisk as most men who are actually thirty years my juniors.

But there is another factor of which I am prouder yet, and this is that I am now the sole survivor of the many men who at one time or another have been engaged in searching for Sir John Franklin and his ill-fated companions in the Arctic seas. They have all died out now but me, all those gallant and intrepid men, right down from Sir Leopold McClintock to the meanest sailor, who took part in the earlier expeditions seeking for Franklin – all dead but me! I am the "last of the flock"!

When sixty years back, we men faced the perils and terrors of the frozen north, expeditions were not equipped and perfected as they are to-day, not by far. The sufferings of those in them were often too terrible for words. But I always tried to be jolly in the midst of the worst troubles, and I must say that I think I succeeded, for my shipmates used to christen me "The Jolly Tinker," owing to my hearty laughter and constant cheerfulness. I must admit, as you may too, that the title was not inappropriate either, seeing that I went out with the search-parties as the blacksmith and armourer of the expedition.

We started from Woolwich on January 10th, 1850, and I was then twenty-six years old. My vessel was H.M.S. Investigator, and, curiously enough, I was the only man on board the ship who was not used to a seafaring career. Indeed, I had never been at sea in all my life before! It does seem strange to me to reflect that to-day, sixty years later, the same vessel, H.M.S. Investigator, is still lying rotting amid Arctic snows, just where we left her when we had to choose between either desertion or sure death! [the *Investigator* was located near Banks Island by Parks Canada in 2010]

My own particular work on the ship began early, for, having called at Plymouth to take in stores, we met a severe storm within a day or two after leaving, and the ship was very badly knocked about by it. Then a little time afterwards another disaster befell us.

Our consort was H.M.S. Enterprise, and we were making for the Straits of Magellan. It has been arranged

that a paddle-steamer should be waiting there to tow us through the dangerous straits. This vessel, the Gorgon, met us and took both ships in tow. But whilst thus on our way a strong gale sprang up, and for the Gorgon's own safety she had to let one of us go, so she cast us off and went on with the Enterprise. Having got this ship through the straits all right, the Gorgon came back for the Investigator, and managed also to tow us into the Pacific safely. But from that day we never saw any more of the Enterprise! What had become of her I never learned; whether anybody else ever did or not I can't say! [for details of this voyage see Barr 2007] But it wasn't a very lucky omen to start with, was it?

Our leader's aim was to reach the Arctic from the Pacific, and it was August when we reached the Behring's Straits. After we had rounded Cape Barrow we found ourselves in a sea which no mortal man had ever sailed previously, so you may be sure it felt a bit uncanny to me who was on my first voyage anywhere, let alone on one into such a solitude and ice-bound region as that was. As we were very determined not to miss finding any relics of Franklin that might be on the shores anywhere about this part we kept close in, with the result that at length we ran aground. This led to more trouble in an unlooked-for way, since we tried to lighten the ship by putting some stores into the boats. Thus we disposed of eleven casks of beef amongst other things; but when at last the vessel floated again the boats capsized, and so all of our priceless supply of good beef went to the bottom of the sea and was lost to us!

We proceeded extremely slowly, searching everywhere for the slightest clue as to what had become of Sir John Franklin and his brave followers. But we found nothing as yet. We passed the Coppermine River, and then, turning out to sea, we came to Baring's Island and certain straits which were named by Captain McClure and after the last King Edward at the time, "Prince of Wales' Straits."

It was here that our first great discovery took place, for McClure made a dash of exploration with a party over the ice, and found that there was a passage through it to the other side. Thus did man for the first time gaze on what is now more familiar as "The North-West Passage," which was for a long period the greatest discovery of Arctic navigators. But we ourselves had to drift carefully about amidst this passage of ice and amongst dangerous floes until January, 1851, fairly working hard every day in trying to keep our limbs alive and capable of use by very violent exercises of various kinds. We had to do at least five hours of this exercise each day if we did not desire to lose the use of them, so you may guess how trying it was.

And we'd eight months of it! Eight months! For it was actually August that year before the Investigator could break free from the ice and make her way southwards. We endeavoured to return round Baring's Island, but were forced by the ice into the bay now known as Mercy Bay. And very thankful were we to get safely into that bay,

after the awful buffeting and dangers we had had with the icebergs and floes.

But, sad to relate, the gallant ship Investigator never came out of the bay! She fell a victim to the ice once more, and it has never set her free since! We ourselves lay there and waited for rescue, sending out expeditions this way and that in order to discover a way back overland. We tried to get away by way of King William's Land and by the Straits, but it was useless. We had to live by shooting wild fowl, deer, and hares, but naturally we soon had our daily rations reduced, and this got worse and worse. We began by six men having to do with four men's allowance, so you may guess what it felt like when we had been reduced to less than half that!

It is impossible for me ever to relate what were then our sufferings and distress. For we lay in that terrible plight right through 1852 and well into 1853, waiting for rescue, waiting for the men who never came, who could not not [sic] reach us nor we them! It was just awful!

In 1852 McClure himself made a strong dash for Melville Island, and left some despatches there, giving an account of what had happened so far, and of our desperate plight. Scurvy, that dreadful horror of sailors when fresh meat and food cannot be obtained, had broken out amongst us, and three men died within eight days from debility and want of proper nourishment [these deaths occurred on 7, 12, 13 April]. Then, in 1853, since it was better, after all, to die in trying to escape than to perish sitting still, our captain picked out half of the ship's company to set off on a rescue search, and these were appointed to leave us for the unknown, death or success – on April 15th.

But, oh, the joy when on that very day we saw two men with a dog-drawn sleigh coming up the ice from the bay, evidently to our rescue. It was the grandest and most joyful sight I ever beheld! And I can assure you that Lieut. Pym, of H.M.S. Resolute [actually Lieutenant Bedford Clapperton Trevelyan Pim], which belonged to another expedition, and had sent men to succor us, was never more enthusiastically greeted in all his life than he was by us survivors of the ill-fated Investigator!

His ship had found McClure's despatches on Melville Island, and had sent out his parties to our assistance immediately. That dangerous and difficult dash of McClure's had saved us; but for it we had been surely altogether lost. We were saved, and though almost too weak to crawl when Pym found us, we nearly went mad in our delight.

Well, I need not tell you of our coming home to England again, heroes more or less, I suppose, though our search for Franklin had not been as successful as we had hoped, and though we had lost our own ship in the business. But we were heartily welcomed by the vast crowds at Britons who have ever been deeply interested in Arctic research and the mysteries of the Polar regions.

For myself, as I look back now on those Arctic adventures from my cottage here near Erith, as I recall the experiences of myself at twenty-six, a vista of over sixty

years ago, I remember many things, and often wonder how I should ever have lived through them at all but for the goodness of Providence. I recollect how I was chasing a deer over the ice when I got lost in a severe snowstorm, and for over twenty hours I could not find the ship at all, and was entirely without food. I had to chew the ends of my cartridges to keep myself going at all, but I groped and stumbled on till I came to a sheltered platform between two big icebergs, and I did sentry duty there, backwards and forwards, to avoid being frozen to death, until the snowstorm ceased. When that happened I discovered that I had been making my way out to sea from the vessel, and I had to crawl back to the ship as well as I could.

Even when I did reach the Investigator again – much to my comrades' surprise, for they had given me up for lost – the food supply was so small that there was only pea-soup, bread and tea, and a very little preserved meat available for the starved man! And the dole I then received had to last me for next day, too!

Another experience I shall not forget was that of one day when a mate and myself made our way to the head of the bay to shoot musk-oxen. Coming back we got into the terrific snowstorm, were always tumbling into deep holes, and at length sat down in despair. My mate was utterly done, and begged me to save my own life by leaving him and going on. But of course that was not to be thought of for a minute, so we rested for a time, then I stirred him up and got him to make another effort. We reached the ship next day more dead than alive, and you can imagine how bad the experience had been when I tell you that the man who had been with me had lost all his toes from frost-bite in that eventful journey.

On that day, when rescue came to us from the Resolute, and we were forced, willy-nilly, to abandon the old ship, we left H.M.S. Investigator flying the white ensign, and with her anchor down. She had remained there ever since, guarding the same spot for the long and historic period of fifty-seven years, surely a record! There has long and often been some talk of trying to get her away, but I should say that this will never happen now. The grand old ship must herself be a very part of the Arctic regions by this time, eh?

And to-day I myself am eighty-six years old! I worked at Woolwich Dockyard after my return till 1869, and then for thirty years I carried on my old trade as a blacksmith at Bedonwell, but in 1899 I retired from such active labour – for good! Eighty-six, and the sole survivor of all the early searches for Franklin! Well, I'm going to stand to the last with my flag flying boldly, I hope, right to the end, like the dear old Investigator out yonder in the grim silence of the Arctic regions!

'An Arctic Hero – Helped to Search for Franklin 60 Years Ago' *Dundee Evening Telegraph* 2 November 1910

In these days of Arctic and Antarctic discussions it is as well to bear in mind sometimes the pioneers of early

expeditions. One of these lives although within an ace of ninety years of age. This is Mr John Potvine, who was one of the crew of the *North Star*, which left this country to succor Franklin in 1849, and, after an absence of twenty months, returned unsuccessful.

Mr Potvine was seen by a press representative. He was found enjoying a quiet smoke in an easy chair at his residence in Upper Norwood, within the shadow of the Crystal Palace. Though, after a long and strenuous life, the old veteran is not, in nautical terms, 'so nimble on his pins' as he was, he is able to get about, and is intellectually bright and certainly very cheerful.

The mere mention of the *North Star* had the effect which the marching of a company of soldiers has on an old soldier. His eyes brightened, and, forgetting all infirmities, he was up and going to search for his papers and medals. The medal for 'Arctic discoveries' is one of which Potvine is particularly proud.

The old hero loves to talk of the adventures of the *North Star*, and of the hardships the crew had to endure. They had to constantly dodge icebergs 'as big as St Paul's Cathedral'. The *North Star* wintered in Wolstenholme Sound, and at times the temperature was below zero. The ship became frozen in on October 12, when the housing was spread over, and every preparation made for the winter. February was the coldest month, and the thermometer was registered at 63 below zero one evening at 10 p.m., and at 61 for the following eight hours.

Four men of the crew died. It was not until August 1, 1850, that the *North Star* was able to leave its winter quarters.

'Arctic Veteran. Portsmouth Survivor's Search for Franklin', *Portsmouth Evening News* 20 March 1911

The late Mr. John J Burns, Naval veteran, of 25, Forbury-road, Southsea, who was buried on Saturday, was one of the last survivors, if not the very last, of the expedition commanded by Sir James Ross which in 1848 went in search of Sir John Franklin.

Burns, who was eighty-nine years of age, had a remarkable career. He was born in Edinburgh, the son of a wine and spirit merchant, and lost his father when still a boy. At the age of thirteen he tramped away from the Scottish capital, and shipped as a boy on board a collier at Sunderland. At the age of sixteen he was wrecked off Seaford, between Eastbourne and Newhaven. The owner paid off the crew, but left the young apprentice to look after the wreck. Burns, however, disliked the job and tramped to London. He worked his passage to Sunderland, where the owner had him arrested for "leaving his ship." For this offence Burns served a month in Durham Gaol.

Witnessed a Flogging

In 1846 he was cod-fishing off Newfoundland, and there joined the Navy as an able seaman, serving for a time aboard the Persian brig, on the West Indian Station. In

1848 the Government decided upon sending out H.M.S. *Enterprise* (Captain James Ross) and H.M.S. *Investigator* (Captain Bird) in search of the lost Franklin expedition. Burns joined the *Investigator*, and sailed from Greenhithe on May 12th, 1848.

He used to tell how the grimmest sight he ever witnessed was the flogging of a sailor before the galley fire when in the Arctic. The sailor had insulted an officer, but the captain unwillingly gave the order. The officer who complained was the only officer who did not get promotion as the result of the expedition.

Ross and his ships cruised about until the winter came, and then went into winter quarters. "We used to be always out in sledges making a search of all likely spots", said Burns. "The longest time we were away from the ship was six weeks". The searchers used to travel by night on the crisp snow and sleep by day. We did not have snow boots, but wore great navy boots with two pairs of stockings on.

"It was in Leopold Bay that we wintered, and all through the winter the whole ships company, officers as well as men, worked digging gravel from a hill and laying a two-mile track over the ice to the mouth of the bay. Then, when the sun came out, the ice rotted, and we got back into the pack which carried us 300 miles to the south before we were free.

"We got clear in September, 1849, and just avoided being in the ice another winter. We reached home a month after, and nobody on board either ship got a cold until we sighted the Orkneys and Shetlands.

"During the winter we used to catch the white fox by means of traps, and then Capt. Ross put a collar round its neck marked to show any of Franklin's men where we were lying".

Served in the Baltic

During the Russian War Burns was in the Baltic on board Admiral Fanshaw[e]'s flagship, the *Boscawen*, 74 guns, blockading Helsingfors. Then in 1851 he saw active service off Lagos. They set fire to King Dahomey's stronghold by means of rockets, and, though few in number, landed and fought the enemy. Several of the bluejackets were killed and their heads stuck on posts. Reinforcements found them on board the tender utterly prostrate from the heat, and Burns was sent to Ascension to recuperate. Proceeding to the Cape they brought Sir Harry Smith home, arriving at Portsmouth on June 10th, 1852.

Burns left the service in 1866. He had both the Arctic and Baltic medals, but they were s[t]olen from his ditty-box when aboard the *Russell* at Sheerness. After that Burns worked in the coastwise coal trade, in the Portsmouth Dockyard as a labourer, and on board a lighter at this port.

Burns also took part in the operations for the raising of the Naval training-ship *Eurydice*, which struck off Dunnose in 1878. A son-in-law of his was among the victims of this disaster.

The deceased veteran was in charge of the stores when the Nares Arctic Expedition was fitting out in 1875, and when the exhibition of them took place he was the chief "showman" and conversed with the ex-Empress Eugenie, to whom he demonstrated the use of the sleep-bag, and said, "We slept like herrings, head to tail", whereat the Empress laughed heartily.

Mr. Burns retained his faculties fairly well almost up to the last, and could well remember the details of his remarkable career. He lived with his grandson (whose father was the Eurydice victim) up to the time of his death, and was confined to the house owing to weakness of the legs. He received severe injuries to the ribs in a fall over the side of a ship while working in the coal trade.

The Funeral

The funeral took place on Saturday at Kingston Cemetery. The coffin, draped with the Union Jack, was conveyed on a gun-carriage in charge of fourteen seamen, including bearers from Whale Island under C.P.O. Platt, who attended by permission of the Commander-in-Chief.

The deceased was in possession of the Baltic and Arctic medals.

The chief mourners were three grandsons and two granddaughters of the deceased, one great-grandson, and Pte. A. Williams, 4th Dragoon Guards, a grand-nephew. The Rev. E.G. Castle, curate of St. Peter's, conducted the Burial Service most impressively. At the close of the rites Bugler R.G. Seeley, R.M.L.I., sounded the "Last Post". The following veterans attended to pay their respects to their old comrade: Messers. Thos. Wedge, Wm. Reeves, S. New, J.J. Goldsmith, I. McGregor, H. Ponsford, Chas. Howes, P. Keaton, Wm. Legge, J. Challis, A. Cheeseman, and H. Lammas, Royal Navy, and Mr. Wm. Turner, R.M.L.I.

'A Link with the Franklin Relief Expedition', *The Western Mail* (Cardiff) 18 January 1913

Mr. James Macartney, one of the few remaining survivors of Arctic expeditions which searched for Sir John Franklin, and the crews of the 'Erebus' and 'Terror' died at Sheerness yesterday, aged 91. Mr. Macartney served in Sir Edward Belcher's Expedition, which left Sheerness nearly sixty-one years ago, sailing in his Majesty's ship 'Assistance', and spending two winters in the Arctic. Mr. Macartney, after retiring from the Government service, was appointed sanitary officer to Sheerness Urban District Council.

'Expedition that went in Search of Franklin. Death of a Veteran of the Sea' *Dundee Evening Telegraph* 2 August 1921

The last link connecting Hull with the old whaling days has been severed by the death of Captain Richard Tether, aged 97, at 30 Derringham Street.

Captain Tether was harpoonist of the famous Hull whalers, such as the *Diana*, *Ælous*, and *Annie*.

Seventy years ago, he has related, many Hull people were connected, directly or indirectly, with whaling, and when vessels sailed crowds gathered to see them go out, and there were times when they returned that church bells were rung.

The commercial value of the whale diminished, and with the advent of steam the industry ended so far as Hull is concerned. Captain Tether was whaling practically the whole time it prospered at Hull.

He went with the expedition sent out by Lady Franklin to try and find Sir John Franklin, whose ship and crew were lost in trying to discover the North-Western Passage. He was mate with Captain Granvill, who died in Greenland in the *Diana* while she was icebound two years, and with the *Ælous*, which was lost off Iceland when returning from Greenland.

'Death of Captain Richard Tether', *Dundee Evening Telegraph* 4 August 1921

The last of the old whaling skippers, Captain Richard Tether, who has just died at Hull, was for many years a shipmate of the late Captain Brown, Peterhead, who regularly sailed for the north from Dundee during the latter part of last century.

Captain Tether was 96 years of age, and during his long experience of the sea had many exciting voyages from Hull. He was with the expedition which was sent out in 1847 to find Sir John Franklin lost in the Arctic regions, and leaving food on the ice his was the last ship which saw Franklin alive.

He was predeceased by his old friend and former shipmate, Captain Brown, by a number of years. Captain Brown, too, had many adventurous voyages, and was also with one of the Arctic relief expeditions. He sailed on the *Discovery* which was sent out with the *Alert* to find traces of the daring explorer, last seen by Captain Tether [these ships were actually part of the British Arctic Expedition, 1875–1876, which was sent out to reach the North Pole].

'Arctic Explorer's Widow Dead', *Gloucestershire Echo* (Cheltenham) 28 December 1934

Mrs. Mary Anne Toms, Hove's oldest inhabitant, who died on Christmas Day and was buried at Hove to-day, would have reached her 100th birthday next March. She was the widow of Dr. F.Y. Toms, R.N., who died twelve years ago at the age of 96. Dr. Toms was a famous arctic explorer and took part in the search for Sir John Franklin in 1851 [serving on the *North Star* and *Pioneer*]. Mrs. Toms retained her mental faculties to the last.

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