

The men who sailed with Franklin

Ralph Lloyd-Jones

Fulham Library, 598 Fulham Road, London SW6 5NX

Received April 2005

ABSTRACT. Using research methods well-known to family history investigators, it is possible to discover a remarkable amount of biographical information not merely on the officers, but also about the ratings who sailed — and died — with Sir John Franklin and Captain Francis Crozier on the 1845 Northwest Passage expedition. The findings from this research, mostly carried out at local and national archives in and around London, greatly enhances the understanding of that disaster, filling in gaps and answering questions raised by recent archaeological and forensic discoveries. This is the hitherto ignored social background to the last voyage of HMS *Erebus* and HMS *Terror*.

Contents

Introduction	311
Polar veterans	312
Previous service on other ships	314
The Hartnell brothers	315
A variety of ships	316
Officers' servants	317
Petty Officer Henry Peglar	317
Conclusions	318
References	318

Introduction

The National Archives at Kew retain many Royal Navy ships' Muster Books and Pay Books from 1667 to 1878. These large (foolscap) volumes were kept by the Paymaster & Purser on every vessel at sea. During those 211 years, British ships visited all the oceans and most of the coastlines on the planet, employing tens of thousands of forgotten sailors. Accurate records were kept to ensure that everyone, from a Royal Admiral like the Duke of Clarence to any 'Boy 3rd Class,' was paid according to his contribution. After 1800 there are sometimes also 'Description Books.' These are a smaller format, but may be found bound together with one or more Muster Books from a particular ship. These are now — for unintended reasons — extremely interesting to historians. In the nineteenth century, the Royal Navy kept a fairly detailed written description of a man simply because the authorities felt he was not to be trusted. If he deserted, the book recorded what he looked like, helping them to recapture him. In the case of the crews of HMS *Erebus* and HMS *Terror*, modern historians, too, want to 'catch' those sailors. Finding out about them is made easier by the fact that after the first stage of their Northwest Passage expedition, when they had reached Greenland and just entered the Arctic Circle, Muster Books — strictly 'Sailing books,' that is, the first from a long voyage — of both vessels were sent back to England on the supply ship *Baretto Junior*.

On Sir John Franklin's *Erebus*, this book (ADM 38/0672) was kept by Paymaster & Purser Charles Osmer between 4 March and 19 May 1845. Osmer himself

appears at the top of the second list, 'Commissioned Officers Civil Branch,' of whom there are three. Above that there is a list of 10 'Commissioned Officers – Military Branch.' Then there are four warrant officers, although one of them, Joseph Robinson, was discharged and transferred to HMS *Vernon* on 7 April. The names of 57 members of the 'Ship's Company' follow. Nine of these only sailed as far as Dundee (where they were going to join HMS *Perseus*), and one, Francis Clarke, returned to England on *Baretto Junior*. That left 45 men and two 'Boys of the First Class' in a separate list. The author of a recent work on the 1845 expedition is mistaken when he states that boy members of the crew were 'properly midshipmen' (Cookman 2000: 65). They were actually sailors under the age of 20. Classification was strictly a matter of seniority; 11- to 13-year-olds entered as Boys Third Class, although nobody that young was sent to the Arctic. Of the other 45, 20 were simply described as Able Seamen (AB). Note that there were no Ordinary Seamen, a more junior, lower-paid sailor, on either ship. The Boatswain, Carpenter, and Engineer on both ships were warrant officers; the remaining 22 were petty officers. Most of these had job description titles that speak for themselves, such as Sailmaker, Caulker, Cook, Blacksmith. It should, however, be explained that the Captain of the Forecastle and Captain of the Hold were warrant officers responsible for those areas, that is, on and below decks. The Captain of the Maintop and Captain of the Foretop were in charge aloft: when the men were working the sails of the mainmast and foremast. Neither ship required a Captain of the Mizzen, because their mizzen masts had been re-rigged to carry fore-and-aft sails that required fewer men, the space thereby saved being used for stores.

Personnel on Captain Francis Crozier's HMS *Terror* mirrored that of *Erebus*. One difference is that the Muster Book (ADM 38/1962) was kept from 3 March to 17 May 1845 by Edwin Helpman, whose rank was Clerk in Charge rather than Purser. He listed himself as the only Subordinate Officer, although there are eight commissioned officers in the Military Branch and two (the surgeons) in the Civil Branch lists. Then there are the three warrant officers followed by a 'Ship's Company' of 58 men and three Boys First Class. Twelve of them

were only going as far as Scotland to join HMS *Perseus*. One man, James Savage, was discharged to 'Woolwich Hosp[ital] for Medical treatment' on 24 April, even before they had sailed. Robert Nixon was discharged for reasons unrecorded 10 days before they left Woolwich, John Brawn returned from Scotland in early June, and one of the Boys, William Eaton, was discharged on 29 April. That left 19 ABs and 21 petty officers to sail and perish with Crozier and his 15 officers/warrant officers. Note that no mention has been made of the seven Royal Marines on board each ship who have been examined in an earlier article (Lloyd-Jones 2004).

The date of each officer's and every sailor's 'Appearance' is given in the Muster Book, that is, when he arrived at the ship and was entered into that volume. The book also records from where he had just come. Five of the officers on *Erebus* (including Franklin himself and Commander James Fitzjames) and three on *Terror* (including Crozier) came from 'Half Pay,' meaning that they were being held available for service, but not actually at work on a ship or at a depot. The other 13 commissioned officers came from active duty on shipboard, or 'Per Acting Commission,' meaning as directed by the Commission that they had recently acquired. This article is not primarily concerned with officers, but it is worth mentioning that three on *Erebus* and two on *Terror* came direct from HMS *Excellent*, of which more below.

Fourteen members of each ship's company were 'first entries.' This does not, of course, mean that they were inexperienced in the ways of the sea. For example, James W. Brown, aged 28, was a first-entry man on *Erebus* and is listed as Caulker, a petty officer specialist in charge of packing the seams of the ship. As he came from Deptford, just upriver from their Woolwich departure point, it is certain that he had been employed in the skilled trade of caulking for many years in the merchant marine service. Other first-entry men had almost certainly worked as whalers and already sailed in Arctic waters as civilians; both the Admiralty and Commander Fitzjames would have taken such experience into account when selecting the crews. As they had no earlier Royal Naval service, the details of the lives of the 28 first-entry men can only be speculated on. The majority were ABs in their twenties, but exceptions include John Kenley, a Quartermaster on *Terror*, one of the oldest at 44. He came from St Andrews in Scotland and must have had merchant marine experience to be entrusted with such a responsible post. On *Erebus*, 33-year-old Leading Stoker James Hart of Hampstead, then a village in Middlesex, would have had previous knowledge of such work in industry, the merchant marine, or on the railways. Yet even without Admiralty records, it is sometimes possible to find out more about first-time Navy men from other sources, notably church records.

For those born in or near the capital, parish registers may be found on microfiche at London Metropolitan Records. An interesting example is that of William Wentzell, first-entry man on *Terror*, aged 33. The unusual,

apparently German, name made it easier to trace him. There survives a record (X092/170) of 'William Son of Elizabeth Wëzenden [born] Illeg[itimate] [at] Grays Inn Workhouse.' As this is dated 31 May 1812 it exactly corresponds to his age, and, despite the slightly different name, is certainly him.

Even if a Royal Navy man had not been to sea for several years, he was expected to retain a personal 'Certificate' of previous service. Signed by a ship's Captain at the end of every voyage, this enabled the Purser or Clerk keeping a Muster Book to record whence that man had come and exactly when he left. The whole of every sailor's previous record was copied into each ship's Description Book. Of course, the 1845 Description Books from both *Erebus* and *Terror* were destroyed along with almost everything else on board. Yet in several instances it is possible to trace the entire careers of men from those vessels simply by finding them in the book from their previous vessel. It is also interesting to consider in what types of ship, varying from dockyard lighters to 1st Rate men-of-war, the Arctic discovery crews had served.

Having excluded officers, those who never entered the Arctic Circle, and the 14 first-entry men, there remain 62 sailors, 32 on *Erebus*, 30 on *Terror*. Between them they had last served on no fewer than 41 different vessels, 23 of which were warships, the rest auxiliaries. These statistics put paid to an erroneous theory, often advanced, that Franklin's officers and men were inexperienced innocents naively sailing to their doom. From those 41 vessels, 35 Muster and 28 Description Books have been examined, *all* of which have yielded further information about Franklin's men. Some of the Description Books enable the construction of a relatively detailed biography, transforming a man from being a mere name on a list to having a physical appearance, a career, and a life.

Polar veterans

Nine sailors had previously served with James Clark Ross on *Erebus* and *Terror* in his 1839–43 Antarctic expedition. They were all discharged on 23 September 1843 and re-enlisted in 1845, not necessarily being allocated to the same ship or job as before. For example, John Diggle of London, aged 36 in 1845, was ship's Cook on *Terror*, whereas he had only been an AB on *Erebus* in the Antarctic. He originally joined the Royal Navy in 1839 and had served in warships. Richard Wall, aged 45 and from Staffordshire, retained the post of Cook on *Erebus*, his conduct on the Antarctic voyage being described as 'Very Good' (ADM38/8045).

James Rigden, aged 34, Captain's Coxswain to Franklin himself, was another experienced sailor. Son of John and Frances Rebecca of Middle Deal in Kent, he was baptised 'James Frederick Elgar Rigden' on 19 September 1811 (Kent County Records: TR 2703/3). His unusual three given names suggest that John and Frances hoped their son would follow a more genteel career, but he entered the Royal Navy and had already served on the

18-gun brig-sloop HMS *Pelican*, based at Woolwich, which was where *Erebus* and *Terror* were fitted and their crews recruited. For a few months he served on Her Majesty's Steam Ship *Dwarf*, a coastguard cutter, the Description Book of which reports that he was 5 feet 7 1/2 inches tall, with a fresh complexion, grey eyes, and brown hair; also that he had '2 Sailors and J.R. [tattooed] on [his] right arm' (ADM38/8006). Joining *Erebus* on 2 May 1839, Rigden was almost immediately promoted from AB to Captain's Co[xswai]n, supervising those who rowed a boat for their commanding officer. This shows that he knew about handling large boats. He retained that post until August 1841, when he briefly took a pay cut back to AB, prior to being promoted to Captain of the Maintop a month later. In May 1843 he was further promoted to Quartermaster, an important petty officer, of which there were three. Yet he only held that position for four months because both ships were home and paid off towards the end of September. As one might guess, his conduct, too, was considered 'Very Good' (ADM38/8045).

Diggle, mentioned above, was promoted from AB to Quartermaster in July 1839. Another who had served on *Erebus* in Ross' expedition was William Hardy, from Kingston-upon-Hull, who joined Ross at Port Louis in the Falkland Islands on 13 April 1842. He almost certainly got there on a whaler. In 1845 he called himself Samuel Brown and was Boatswain's Mate on the same ship (where the alias was noted).

Crozier had already commanded *Terror* on Ross' Antarctic voyage. Five sailors served during that period who subsequently accompanied him and Franklin to the Arctic. Much can be learned about them because the Description Book has, in this instance, survived. Thomas Richard Farr, born in Deptford in 1813, was Captain of the Maintop on both expeditions. He had joined the Royal Navy aged 13 and began his career serving as a Boy on the newly built *Prince Regent*, a 1st Rate ship of 120 guns, for eight months. He then transferred to the much smaller 10-gun brig-sloop *Fairy*, where he served three years and one month in and around Jamaica. He was 5 feet 5 inches tall, had a fair complexion, dark hazel eyes, and dark hair. He was also tattooed on 'Both arms and Thighs.' Ten years are then unaccounted for until he first joined *Terror* at Hobart, Tasmania — where Franklin was Lieutenant-Governor — on 9 November 1840, three days before Ross sailed south (Ross 1994: 224). It is certain that Farr had reached Australia in the merchant service, probably working on a ship bringing immigrants, and he now decided to rejoin the Royal Navy.

Another, less-experienced sailor, who joined for his first entry at Hobart in September 1840, was Luke Smith, born in Shadwell in 1818. He was 5 feet 8 inches tall, of fresh complexion, with dark hazel eyes and dark brown hair. He bore his initials tattooed on his right arm, and the Description Book indicates he had been vaccinated against smallpox. Having seen the Antarctic as an AB, he rejoined the ship to be a Stoker for the 1845 Northwest Passage expedition.

William Jerry, born in St David's, Pembrokeshire, in 1816, joined *Terror* as a first-entry man in May 1839 before she sailed south from London. He was 5 feet 6 inches tall, of a fair complexion, with 'Light Hazel' eyes and 'Light' hair. Although the Description Book indicates he was 'brought up to the Sea,' he never held the rank of petty officer and remained an AB in both polar regions. Where the books list 'Trade brought up to,' it is almost always given as 'Sea' for these sailors. This is by contrast with the Marines, most of whom had been either agricultural labourers or had pursued a profession such as butcher or shoemaker before enlisting, and who generally grew up inland, rather than near the sea like the vast majority of these sailors (Lloyd-Jones 2004).

Thomas Jopson was Captain's Steward to Crozier on both voyages. Son of a tradesman, William Jopson and his wife Sarah, he was christened at St Marylebone Church, Marylebone Road in London on 8 December 1816 (LMR: X023/018). He first set foot on *Terror* on 12 September 1839, but had joined the Royal Navy in 1838 and served on HMS *Racer*, a 16-gun brig-sloop. He was 5 feet 5 1/2 inches tall with a fair complexion, hazel eyes, and brown hair. As befitted the senior officer's servant, he was not tattooed, although he had an accidental distinguishing feature, a 'Scar on [his] r[igh]t leg' (ADM 38/9162).

Finally, from the five who went with *Terror* on both the Ross and Franklin expeditions, there was a third Thomas, Thomas Johnson, who originally joined as a 22-year-old AB on 1 July 1839. Despite being born quite far inland at Wisbech in Cambridgeshire, he too was 'brought up to' the sea. Wisbech is sometimes called the 'capital of the Fens,' and there remains plenty of waterborne activity to this day and would have been even more in the early nineteenth century. Because there has never been a chapel in Wisbech, his Methodist parents, Thomas and Mary, took him to be christened at St Mary's Wesleyan Church in Ely on 2 May 1821 (IGI). Two decades later he was 5 feet 8 inches tall, of sallow complexion with hazel eyes and dark hair. Within a few days he was made Captain of the Maintop (6 July), in which responsible post he remained until being promoted Quartermaster on 29 October 1840. In 1845 he was the most important petty officer, Boatswain's Mate. Although Jerry's conduct was only 'Good,' Johnson, Jopson, Smith, and Farr were all described as 'Very Good' (ADM 38/9162).

As well as finding that Thomas Johnson was brought up a Methodist, the christening of a Congregationalist amongst the first-entry men on *Erebus* has been traced. The Family Records Centre contains a microfilm copy of this detailed nonconformist register entry: 'Abraham Seely the son of Noah Seely and Martha his wife of the Parish of Gravesend was born Nov^r 9th 1810 and was baptised Dec^{br} 30th following by me W^m Kent' (RG4/1372).

This is exceptional in giving an exact date of birth, not just the date of his baptism. Sometimes, as is the case today, children were not baptised for many years, if at all.

Previous service on other ships

As mentioned, five officers, Lieutenants Hodgson and Irving (*Terror*) and Lieutenant Fairholme, First Mate Robert Sargent, and Second Mate Charles Des Voeux (*Erebus*) all came from HMS *Excellent*. This ship has been described as ‘the navy’s elite gunnery training vessel’ [Cookman 2000: 64], but in fact she was the old (1810) 2nd Rate *Boyne*, then moored in Portsmouth, where most officers spent a few months learning about fire-power. Far from being ‘elite’ *Excellent* was simply a routine stage in an officer’s career. Now land-based on Whale Island, Portsmouth, HMS *Excellent* still exists as a Royal Navy training facility.

Another elderly ship, of more relevance here, was HMS *Belvidera*, a 5th Rate of 36 guns built at Deptford in 1809. No fewer than five ABs, three on *Terror* and two on *Erebus*, had been discharged from this ship on 5 March 1845, when she returned from the Mediterranean. These men then immediately joined the Franklin expedition because they were anxious to remain employed by the Royal Navy. *Belvidera* had an exotic crew that included West Africans and several Maltese, although the only non-Englishmen who went to *Erebus* were a Scot and an Irishman. The Scottish Captain of the Foretop was 27-year old Robert Sinclair, originally from Kirkwall in Orkney. Another sailor on *Erebus*, the 41-year-old first-entry AB Thomas Work, also came from Kirkwall. It must have been these two to whom Commander Fitzjames referred when, describing their brief stay in Stromness, he wrote: ‘two men wanted to see — one his wife whom he had not seen for four years, and the other his mother whom he had not seen for seventeen — so I let them go to Kirkwall, fourteen miles off’ (Fitzjames 1852: 161). In view of the tragedy that would consume them all, this is poignant, but it also indicates that Sinclair had left home and gone to sea at the age of 10. Thomas Work was subsequently described by Fitzjames as a ‘little old [! sic] man,’ when he and two others went briefly AWOL to drink whisky in Stromness. In the same paragraph, Fitzjames wrote the erroneously much-quoted ‘Our men are all fine, hearty fellows, mostly North-countrymen’ (Fitzjames 1852), in which he was mistaken, as most of them actually came from what is now Greater London (Middlesex and Surrey) and especially Kent. In fact, no fewer than 14 crew of *Erebus* and seven on *Terror* were from that county. Sinclair had served two years (March 1839–November 1841) on the sloop *Orestes* before his four years with *Belvidera*. He was 5 feet 5 inches tall with a fresh complexion, black eyes, and black hair (ADM38/7929).

Although two of the 14 Royal Marines on Franklin’s expedition were from Ireland, only one sailor, Cornelius Hickey, Caulker’s Mate on *Terror*, came from there. He was born in 1826 in Limerick. *Belvidera*’s Description Book also indicates that he had black eyes and hair with fair complexion and a ‘Face marked with the Pox.’ He was brought up to the trade of shipwright. The other two who

went from *Belvidera* to *Terror* were ABs William Strong, aged 22, and Henry Sait, 23. Strong, who was born in Portsmouth, had transferred to *Belvidera* from another warship, HMS *Tyne* (6th Rate), at Malta in December 1842. He was then still young enough to be ‘Boy First Class,’ 5 feet 8 inches tall, of fresh complexion with blue eyes and dark hair. Sait, or ‘Said’ as it was sometimes written, was originally from Bognor in Sussex, 5 feet 5 1/2 inches tall, fair-skinned, with hazel eyes and brown hair. He had been vaccinated (ADM38/7629). There were two other Boys 1st Class called William Smith on *Belvidera* at that time, but neither was the Norfolk-born one who, aged 28, served as the Blacksmith on *Erebus*. He is the only non-first-entry sailor who remains untraced, the very common name leading to anonymity.

Four very different ships provided three men each for the 1845 expedition. These were HMS *Ocean*, an old (1805) 2nd Rate warship, reduced to a depot ship at Sheerness in 1841; *Mastiff* a (12-)gun-brig that was used as a survey vessel (1825–51) in the Orkneys; the Woolwich-based yacht *William and Mary*; and *Vesuvius*, which, as her name suggests, was a steam-powered wooden paddle sloop built in 1839. William Fowler, aged 26 and from Bristol, was Paymaster & Purser’s Steward on *Ocean*, which he left on 10 October 1844. He had the same job, as steward to Charles Osmer, on *Erebus*. Thomas Honey of Plymouth, aged 34, was a warrant officer: Carpenter 3rd Class. He worked on *Ocean* from July 1844 until 6 March 1845, when he joined *Terror*. Honey had already served in her on Ross’ Antarctic expedition. Another warrant officer, this time on *Erebus*, was Boatswain Thomas Terry, also 34, from Hackney, then a village in Middlesex. He had come to *Ocean* at the same time as Honey, from the 6th Rate warship HMS *Vestal* (ADM38/1287). Unfortunately the Description Book of *Ocean* has not survived, but it clearly emerges that these men were highly experienced in their specialities. It is, however, interesting to get the age of Terry, a warrant officer, from the Muster Book; more typically this is not given, as in the case of John Weekes, carpenter on *Erebus*, who had also served on *Ocean*, but had since transferred to the 50-gun *Eagle* (ADM38/644).

One of the ABs from *Mastiff*, Joseph Lloyd of Greenwich, aged 25, was discharged from *Erebus* on 25 April 1845, possibly because he was married and had second thoughts about going to the Arctic. The other two from that ship were officers, Second Master Gillies Macbean and Mate Robert Thomas, who, before his commission, had been a Midshipman on *Mastiff* (ADM38/8518).

Two very experienced sailors and one Boy on *Terror* returned from the Mediterranean with *Vesuvius*. The Boy was 18-year-old George Chambers from Woolwich who was actually only with *Vesuvius* from 31 March to 5 April 1845. Unfortunately for him, he was in the right place and of the right age to be ordered by the Admiralty to join the Arctic expedition. Although he had had smallpox, he retained a fresh complexion, with grey eyes and brown

hair. He was only 5 feet tall. George Thompson, by contrast, was 27 years old and had sailed on five voyages with four different ships before joining *Terror*. Thompson was 5 feet 7 1/2 inches tall, of a dark complexion, with grey eyes and brown hair. He was also impressively tattooed, with 'A rose & thistle on [his] right arm[,] a Ship, sailor & England for ever on [his] left Arm.' He originated from Staines, but lived in Whitechapel at the time. John Cowie, aged 32 and married, joined *Erebus* as an AB having already served on four other ships. He was promoted to the rank of Stoker on 6 May 1845, six days before they sailed from Woolwich. It seems likely that he was a friend of Thompson's, as they had both served on the unidentified ship *Bruce*, and on HMS *Poictiers* together. He was 5 feet 6 1/2 inches tall with dark skin, hazel eyes and black hair. He had 'J.A. Cowie' tattooed on his left arm (ADM38/9244). It will be observed that sailors often had their name or initials tattooed on an arm, presumably in case their mutilated body ever had to be identified.

An officer and a warrant officer came from the yacht *William and Mary*. These were the Surgeon, John Peddie, who was promoted from Assistant Surgeon on 12 March 1845 to take up his post on *Terror*, and Boatswain John Lane. They had both been on *William and Mary* since 1 July the previous year, as had Stoker Thomas Plater, another Londoner, who went to *Erebus* on 24 March. Although there is no Description book, the Muster book shows that £3.19.4 1/2 was deducted from his pay for 'Navy Slops, including Beds and Waxed Wrappers' and that he spent 2s 0d on tobacco (which was frugal, as most sailors spent 3s 0d a month) (ADM38/2269).

There were seven ships that sent two men each to the Franklin expedition. Again, one is struck by the sheer variety of vessels. Technologically, the early 1840s were very important years because, although there had been paddle steamers in the Royal Navy since the 1820s, they were now developing effective screw-propellers. One man, William Rhodes, 31-year-old Quartermaster on *Terror*, had come from the famous screw-driven HMS *Rattler*, which, no doubt with him on board, easily won a tug-of-war against the paddle steamer *Alecto* in March 1845. Rhodes, who came from Redinghurst in Kent, was an extremely experienced sailor and had previously served on no fewer than eight ships. The Description Book from Her Majesty's Steam Sloop *Rattler* describes him as having had a ruddy complexion, blue eyes and brown hair, 5 feet 7 inches tall, and with a 'Scar on calf of right leg.' He was also married (ADM38/8828).

Rattler had been built in 1843, and another recent ship, albeit a paddle frigate, was *Cyclops* (1839) from which Graham Gore, 1st Lieutenant on *Erebus*, and Joseph Andrews, Captain of the Hold, came. Andrews, a 35-year-old from Edmonton, left *Cyclops* in May 1843 when she returned from the Mediterranean, but Gore remained for an unhappy voyage to Bantry Island, County Cork, during which a 2nd Engineer and a Stoker were killed — apparently in an engine explosion. As senior lieutenant, Gore had to countersign the record of their deaths — a

foreboding of many more such signings that he must have made on *Erebus* in the Arctic.

Two sailors, John Bridgens of Woolwich, aged about 23, and John Downing, aged 34 and from Plymouth, came to *Erebus* from the very old (1797) 4th Rate ship of the line *Endymion*. There they had both been ABs, paid off when she came back from India in October 1843; but on *Erebus* Downing was a Quartermaster, and Bridgens became Subordinate Officers' Steward (ADM38/663). From the 6th Rate HMS *Herald*, a survey ship in the Indian Ocean, there came a subordinate officer, the Clerk Edwin Helpman who, as mentioned above, kept the books there and on *Terror*. The Muster Book of *Herald* indicates that he was 23 and came from Plymouth. The 42-year-old Joseph Robinson, a warrant officer Gunner, also joined the Arctic expedition, going to *Terror* on 9 March. He was extremely experienced, having served 15 voyages on nine different ships, including 1830–34 with Franklin on the 6th Rate *Rainbow* in the Mediterranean. However, he was discharged less than a month later (7 April), transferring to *Vernon* sailing for the southeast coast of America. Again, this was almost certainly out of consideration for his age and the fact that he was married.

The unglamorous store lighter *Tortoise* provided two sailors, both discharged 11 December 1843, who went to *Erebus*. Francis Pocock, originally a fisherman from Upnor at the mouth of the Medway in Kent, was in his late 20s in 1845, although there is discrepancy about his age, given as 26 in *Tortoise's* Description Book and 24 two years later on *Erebus*. However old, he was described as being freckled with hazel eyes and light-coloured hair. He was 5 feet 4 inches tall and had had smallpox (ADM 38/9186).

The Hartnell brothers

Although younger, being 23, Thomas Hartnell was a veteran compared with Pocock for whom *Tortoise* was his first Royal Navy vessel. Hartnell, who was also much taller at 5 feet 8 1/2 inches, had been in the Navy since 1838. He, too, was freckled with fair [*sic*] eyes and light hair. He had his initials tattooed on his right arm (ADM38/9186).

Hartnell had served on the 6th Rate warship HMS *Volage* in the East Indies from January 1838 to May 1841. On 15 September 1841, his brother, John, joined *Volage* at Chatham, by which time Thomas had transferred to *Tortoise*. John Hartnell is significant because, like the marine William Braine (Lloyd-Jones 2004: 324–325), he is buried on Beechey Island and has been exhumed no fewer than three times, once by Inglefield in 1852 and twice by Owen Beattie, in 1984 and 1986 (Beattie and Geiger 1987). Beattie apparently forgot that Inglefield's doctor, Peter Sutherland, conducted an autopsy on Hartnell's body when he erroneously attributed the evidence of that post-mortem, discovered in 1986, to 'a surgeon on the *Erebus*' (Beattie and Geiger 1987: 140). A few pages earlier he had quoted the most significant findings of Sutherland's autopsy, namely that

Hartnell was ‘a person who had died of consumption’ and that they ‘detected that a wasting illness was the cause of dissolution’ (Beattie and Geiger 1987: 117, 118). Far from confirming his ‘lead poisoning’ theory, Beattie’s significant discovery was that all three of the men buried on Beechey Island died of tuberculosis. He also observed that Hartnell’s corpse was dressed in a shirt embroidered with the initials ‘T.H.’ and the date ‘1844,’ obviously one from his brother Thomas. The Description Book from HMS *Volage* allows a comparison of John Hartnell’s appearance alive in 1841 with that of his frozen remains 145 years later. Beattie indicated that he was ‘180 centimetres (5 feet 11 inches)’ tall (Beattie and Geiger 1987: 143). The Description Book gives his height as 5 feet 11 1/2 inches, remarkably tall for the time and a full three inches taller than his younger brother. It also says that he had a sallow complexion, hazel eyes, and black hair, the last of which was confirmed by the twentieth-century exhumation. Although he died of tuberculosis, there was no sign of the equally virulent smallpox, against which both brothers had been vaccinated in childhood. Most unusually amongst the men who sailed to the Arctic, John had been brought up to the land-based trade of shoemaker (ADM38/9290). It is known from the documentary evidence of his tombstone that John Hartnell died on 4 January 1846, just three days after the (first-entry) Stoker, John Torrington. Franklin himself must have chosen the verse ‘Thus saith the Lord of Hosts; Consider your ways’ (Haggai 1, 7). The Word of the Lord of Hosts might equally apply to a Navy, but this is certainly an obscure and bleak corner of the Old Testament. Should any significance be read into the immediate preceding verse? It reads: ‘Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it in a bag with holes.’ Again, as in the case of the verse from Joshua chosen to embellish William Braine’s neighbouring headstone (Lloyd-Jones 2004: 324), the message is certainly aimed at surviving comrades of the deceased; in the midst of an Arctic winter they must care for their immortal souls.

A variety of ships

Two ABs on *Erebus* came from HMS *Thunder*, which, like *Erebus* and *Terror* had been built as a bomb vessel but was now converted for survey work in American and Caribbean waters. John Strickland from Portsmouth, who had previously served as a Boy 1st Class on *Volage* (1838–41), was 21 in 1845. His ‘florid’ complexion was ‘Marked lightly with Smallpox,’ eyes blue, hair brown. He was 5 feet 7 inches tall and had been brought up to a life at sea. John Sullivan, aged 28, was yet another from New Brompton near Gillingham in Kent. He was only 5 feet 3 inches tall with a dark complexion, hazel eyes, and dark hair. Although not marked by smallpox (which he had suffered), he had a ‘Scar on [his] left cheek.’ He had been in the Navy since 1834, serving on four different ships

before *Thunder*. He, too, was brought up to the sea, but unlike Strickland, was married (ADM38/9177).

From the 1st Rate 120-gun *St Vincent*, reduced since 1841 to a stationary flagship and depot vessel at Portsmouth, came one officer, Edward Couch, Third Mate on *Erebus*, and one petty officer, Edmund Hoar, Captain’s Steward on the same ship. Although Hoar, aged 23 and originally from Portsea in Hampshire, had not been brought up to any particular trade, he had already served as a domestic in the East Indies on HMS *Cornwallis*, his first ship, 1841–44. He was 5 feet 9 inches tall with a fair complexion, blue eyes, and light hair, with an anchor tattooed on his right arm; he had been vaccinated and remained unmarried (ADM38/8937).

At the very start of his book, Cookman mentioned William Orren, a 34-year-old AB on *Erebus*. He was mistaken when he wrote of Orren that ‘He’d been in the navy for fifteen years’ (Cookman 2000: 2). In truth he had been *out of* the navy for 15 years, the Muster Book recording not that he had joined, but that he had been discharged from *Swan*, a 10-gun cutter, in June 1830. He was one of the many Kentish men and, partly thanks to the somewhat unusual surname, his baptism on 4 June 1806, ‘William s[on] of John & Margaret’ is traced to St Mary’s, Chatham (Kent County Records, Microfilm I-22A).

Her Majesty’s Steam Vessel *Styx*, one of the new paddle sloops built at Sheerness in 1841 and in ‘44 just returned from the Azores, provided the youngest person to go on the expedition, a Boy on *Terror*, Thomas G. Evans, aged 17 — although Helpman put him down as being ‘18’ for the purposes of being ‘1st Class,’ minimum qualification for polar service. He, and the first-entry Boy, Robert Golding (also on *Terror*), both came from Deptford. Although he had served on *Styx* since she was commissioned in August 1841 (when he was 13, therefore 3rd Class), Evans was unusual in being recorded as having been brought up to become a ‘Labourer.’ At 16 he was only 5 feet 3 1/2 inches tall, of florid complexion with grey eyes and dark brown hair. He had been vaccinated (ADM38/9111).

Although he had been ‘brought up to’ his maritime skill, the 43-year-old Scot John Murray had only served on one previous Royal Navy ship, HMS *Isis*, from which he had been discharged, rated ‘Very Good,’ on 23 January 1845. He must have been a civilian sailmaker before that, maintaining the profession on both *Isis* and *Erebus*. He was married and had had smallpox (ADM 38/8396). This confirms the earlier theory that even first-entry men and Boys on the 1845 expedition possessed relevant experience and trades.

Two days after Murray was discharged from *Isis*, Reuben Male left the 18-gun brig-sloop HMS *Pelican*. He had actually been born in Woolwich 24 years earlier, although by then living, unmarried, in Deptford. Having joined the navy as an AB in 1840, he reached the rank of Quartermaster towards the end of his time on *Pelican*, accepting the less important post of Captain of

the Forecastle on *Terror*. He, too, had suffered smallpox (ADM 38/8674).

A more recent medical case emerges from the Description Book of HMS *Columbine*, which had sailed via the Cape of Good Hope to the East Indies, 1838–41. A Welsh sailor, George Williams of Rhoscolyn, Anglesey, was invalidated out of the ship's company on return to England 'for chronic Diarrhoea.' That debilitating disease must have been the reason Osmer wrote 'Date of D[ischarge] unknown' when Williams re-enlisted on *Erebus* four years later, aged 35 (ADM 38/0672). However, it was actually 5 January 1841, as shown by the Description Book of *Columbine* (ADM 38/460). Extreme sickness, notably from deficiency diseases like scurvy, was definitely a factor in the Franklin disaster; and it has already been noted that three deaths occurred from tuberculosis on Beechy Island, where the ships spent their first winter in the Arctic.

Officers' servants

The identification of officers' domestics is important, due to the 1859 discovery of a skeleton dressed in the remains of a steward's uniform (McClintock 1881; Cyriax and Jones 1954; Cyriax 1958). Each ship had four petty officers who were servants: for the Captain, the Subordinate Officers, the Paymaster & Purser, and the Gun room Stewards. Thomas Jopson, Captain's Steward on *Terror*, John Bridgens, Subordinate Officers' Steward on *Erebus*, and William Fowler, Paymaster & Purser's Steward on *Erebus*, have already been described. Edmund Hoar, 23-year-old Captain's Steward on *Erebus*, had previously served as a domestic on HMS *Cornwallis*, December 1841 to November 1844. He had then very briefly gone to *St Vincent* (another depot ship) as an AB 'to wait pas[sage] to "Erebus" per O[fficers]'. He was 5 feet 9 inches tall, with a fair complexion, blue eyes, and light-coloured hair. He had been vaccinated and had a tattoo of an 'Anchor on right arm' (ADM 38/8937). This suggests that good servants were carefully sought; it may be significant that Edward Couch, an officer (Mate) on *Erebus*, also came from *St Vincent*. That leaves one more domestic with *Erebus*, the Gun room Steward Richard Aylmore (aged 24 in 1845). His first entry had been to HMS *Clio*, a 16-gun sloop that he had joined at Calcutta on 15 June 1843. He must have reached India on a civilian ship, which is not surprising, as he had been born in Southampton, a major port of embarkation for the east. Aylmore was then Captain's Steward to *Clio*'s James Fitzjames who was, of course, Commander of *Erebus*. With his conduct described as 'Very Good' it is clear that Fitzjames took the able steward from the East Indies to the contrasting environment of the Arctic (ADM 38/7803).

The remaining servants on *Terror* included William Gibson, Subordinate Officers' Steward, aged 22 in 1845. He had joined the Royal Navy at 17 and served on HMS *Wanderer* for 22 months. Another Londoner, he had fair skin, hazel eyes, and brown hair (ADM 38/9306). He

was an inexperienced sailor compared with his shipmate Henry Peglar, whose career is described below.

Edward George had only been a Boy 1st Class, rising to Ordinary Seaman on HMS *Cambridge* when he was discharged 'Per Request & Order' in January 1843 (ADM 38/378). This is rather mysterious because he returned to the Royal Navy two years later, going straight in as Paymaster & Purser's Steward to Helpman. It may well be that he gained experience as a civilian servant during those two years. Finally amongst the domestics there was Thomas Armitage, Gun room Steward on *Terror*. He was a 40-year-old married man, originally from Deptford, who had served in the same capacity on the steam vessel *Dee* from July to October 1844. He had also been on seven ships before that, named, although HMS *Dee*'s Description Book lacks dates. He was 5 feet 6 inches tall, of fresh complexion, with brown hair and eyes, and had had smallpox (ADM 38/7946). Thus, even the servants were, for the most part, veteran sailors.

Petty Officer Henry Peglar

Two men came to *Terror* from the 16-gun brig-sloop *Wanderer*; one was William Gibson, already described. By contrast, Captain of the Foretop Henry Peglar, aged 37 in 1845, was a veteran. Peglar, another Londoner from Westminster, stands out amongst Franklin's men because he is associated with the forensic and documentary evidence discovered on King William Island in 1859 by McClintock and William Hobson. He had joined the Royal Navy when he was 12 or 13 and briefly saw harbour service in Portsmouth on the 3rd Rate 74-gun *Magnificent*, then serving as a hospital ship. He soon transferred to the more exciting 6th Rate 28-gun *Rattlesnake* going to the Caribbean, 1826–27. After a year ashore, or perhaps still at sea in the merchant service, he was back with the Royal Navy on HMS *Talavera* (3rd Rate, 74-guns) 1829–33, operating out of Sheerness and in the Downs (English Channel). On 4 April 1834 he transferred to the 18-gun brig-sloop HMS *Gannet*, which sailed into the Mediterranean before crossing the Atlantic for four years' service in North American and West Indian waters. Discharged from *Gannet* in February 1838, he joined HMS *Ocean*, remaining with her in Sheerness from July until December the following year when, surprisingly, Captain Sir John Hill recorded Peglar's conduct as 'Indifferent,' perhaps because he wanted to be back out on the open sea. If that was his wish, then it was granted when he transferred straight to *Wanderer* on 3 December, returning to America and the Caribbean for the year 1840, followed by a year involved in anti-slaving operations off the West African coast before sailing for India and action in China (Opium War) in 1842. By the time he was discharged on 27 June 1844, Commander Denman rated Peglar, now Captain of the Foretop on that ship, 'Very Good.' It will be noted that in 20 years' service he had crossed and recrossed the Atlantic three times, sailed the coast of West Africa, and been to the Far East and back. He stood 5 feet 7 1/2 inches tall, his complexion was

sallow, eyes hazel, and hair brown (ADM38/9306; *Navy Lists* 1825–44).

Conclusions

Certain patterns begin to emerge when the findings of this research are examined. The average age of sailors on Franklin's final voyage (both ships) was 28. Even men in their early 20s were experienced sailors, either from having been in the Royal Navy from a very early age, or through merchant service. Only the oldest men, those in their 40s, were married; sailors put their careers at sea before any dreams of domestic bliss.

A popular approach to the nineteenth-century search for a Northwest Passage has been that the Napoleonic Wars were over, there was not much for a greatly reduced Royal Navy to do, so they might as well sail off to the Poles. It is true that the Royal Navy's personnel was cut back after the decisive victory over France in 1815. On the other hand, that established Britain as the world's major superpower; her navy could hardly be disbanded. In fact, as should be clear from the above, the Admiralty was not remiss in keeping up with technological developments, at least in steam/paddle/propeller-driven vessels (although the French beat them to ironclad battleships in 1850). Nor were they simply testing peacetime ideas in the 1820s, 1830s and 1840s. Although slavery was not fully abolished throughout the British Empire until 1834, the Royal Navy had operated an anti-slavery squadron off the Atlantic coast of Africa since 1807 (when Britain ceased trading in, although not using, slaves in her colonies). The Royal Navy also took an active part in the Opium War in China (1840–42) and in the Carlist conflict in Spain (1830–39). It is now established that men who died on the Franklin expedition of 1845 had seen action in all of these largely forgotten conflicts, which were subsequently eclipsed in popular imagination by the Crimean War, Boer War, First World War, and Second World War. The Royal Navy, furthermore, was involved in survey work that provided the basis of almost all modern maritime maps, and with such scientific expeditions as that of HMS *Beagle* (1831–36), the consequences of which are of universal importance.

It is therefore both foolish and insulting when Franklin, his officers, and men are dismissed as innocent,

inexperienced victims (or even villains) of a hubristic state that sought to somehow conquer the natural world itself. They were very well aware of the dangers that they faced, very well qualified to undertake them, and tragically unfortunate in their lack of success. Failure in no way diminishes their heroism.

References

- The main primary source was Royal Navy Muster and Description Books. Those that have survived are held in the National Archives, Kew, classified ADM (Admiralty). The ones relevant to the 1830s and 1840s are in ADM 38. The official *Navy List* (published quarterly from 1814) indicates where ships were. For church records, the *International Genealogical Index* (IGI) is a useful starting-point. Microfilm and transcripts of parish registers were also consulted at the Family Records Centre, London; London Metropolitan Archives; and the Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone. Basic naval information, such as type, number of guns, etc, on all Royal Navy ships mentioned in the text came from Colledge (2003).
- Beattie, O., and J. Geiger 1987. *Frozen in time: the fate of the Franklin expedition*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Colledge, J.J. 2003. *Ships of the Royal Navy: the complete record of all fighting ships of the Royal Navy*. London: Greenhill Books.
- Cookman, S. 2000. *Ice blink: the tragic fate of Sir John Franklin's lost polar expedition*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Cyriax, R.J. 1939. *Sir John Franklin's last Arctic expedition: a chapter in the history of the Royal Navy*. (Reprinted 1997, Plaistow and Sutton Coldfield: the Arctic Press.)
- Cyriax, R.J. 1958. The two Franklin Expedition records found on King William Island. *The Mariner's Mirror* 44 (3): 179–189.
- Cyriax, R.J., and A.G.E. Jones. 1954. The papers in the possession of Harry Peglar, Captain of the Foretop, HMS *Terror*. *The Mariner's Mirror* 40 (3): 186–195.
- Fitzjames, J. 1852. Arctic matters. *The Nautical Magazine*, March 1852: 158–165.
- Lloyd-Jones, R.A. 2004. The Royal Marines on Franklin's last expedition. *Polar Record* 40 (215): 319–326.
- McClintock, F.L. 1881. *The voyage of the 'Fox' in the Arctic seas: a narrative of the fate of Sir John Franklin and his companions*. Fifth edition. London: John Murray.
- Ross, M.J. 1994. *Polar pioneers: John Ross and James Clark Ross*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.