

## Sir John Franklin collection [cartographic materials, textual records]

### COLLECTION NUMBER

VMM51

### DATE(S)

1829-1882

### ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY / BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Rear-Admiral Sir John Franklin (16 April 1786 – 11 June 1847) was a Royal Navy officer and experienced explorer. Franklin had served on three previous Arctic expeditions, the latter two as commanding officer. His fourth and last, undertaken when he was 59, was meant to traverse the last unnavigated section of the Northwest Passage. After a few early fatalities, the two ships, *Erebus* and *Terror*, became icebound in Victoria Strait near King William Island in the Canadian Arctic. The entire expedition complement, including Franklin and 128 men, was lost.

Pressed by Franklin's wife, Lady Jane Franklin, and others, the Admiralty launched a search for the missing expedition in 1848. Prompted in part by Franklin's fame and the Admiralty's offer of a finder's reward, many subsequent expeditions joined the hunt, which at one point in 1850 involved eleven British and two American ships. Several of these ships converged off the east coast of Beechey Island, where the first relics of the expedition were found, including the graves of three crewmen. In 1854, explorer John Rae, while surveying near the Canadian Arctic coast southeast of King William Island, acquired relics of and stories about the Franklin party from the Inuit. A search led by Francis Leopold McClintock in 1859 discovered a note left on King William Island with details about the expedition's fate. Searches continued through much of the 19th century. Finally, in 2014, a Canadian search team located HMS *Erebus* west of O'Reilly Island, in the eastern portion of Queen Maud Gulf, in the waters of the Arctic archipelago.

In 1981, a team of scientists led by Owen Beattie, a professor of anthropology at the University of Alberta, began a series of scientific studies of the graves, bodies, and other physical evidence left by Franklin crew members on Beechey Island and King William Island. They concluded that the crew members whose graves had been found on Beechey Island most likely died of pneumonia and perhaps tuberculosis and that lead poisoning may have worsened their health, owing to badly soldered cans held in the ships' food stores. However, it was later suggested that the source of this lead may not have been tinned food, but the distilled water systems fitted to the expedition's ships. Cut marks on human bones found on King William Island were seen as signs of cannibalism. The combined evidence of all studies suggested that hypothermia, starvation, lead poisoning and disease including scurvy, along with general exposure to a hostile environment whilst lacking adequate clothing and nutrition, killed everyone on the expedition in the years following its last sighting by Europeans in 1845.

The Victorian media portrayed Franklin as a hero despite the expedition's failure and the reports of cannibalism. Songs were written about him, and statues of him in his home town, in London, and in Tasmania credit him with discovery of the Northwest Passage. Franklin's lost expedition has been the subject of many artistic works, including songs, verse, short stories, and novels, as well as television documentaries.

### Contemporary search expeditions:

- **1848:**
  - East: James Clark Ross, (HMS *Enterprise*, HMS *Investigator*) only to Somerset Island because of ice.
  - Center: Rae–Richardson Arctic Expedition Mackenzie River and along the coast.
  - West: HMS *Plover*, HMS *Herald* to Bering Strait; William Pullen reaches Mackenzie by whaleboat.
- **1850:**
  - West: Richard Collinson (HMS *Enterprise*), Robert McClure (HMS *Investigator*) to Bering Strait. McClure frozen in at Banks Island, when rescued becomes first man to cross the northwest passage. Collinson reaches Coronation Gulf, furthest east of any ship.
  - East: Horatio Austin (HMS *Resolute*), Erasmus Ommanney (HMS *Assistance*), plus 2 steam tenders, *Pioneer* and *Intrepid* (cpt John Bertie Cator 1850). Ommanney finds Franklin's Beechey Island camp. Austin's four and the below ships gather around Beechey Island, are frozen in and in spring send out sledge expeditions in all directions. They leave the Arctic before winter in 1851.
  - East: Charles Forsyth (*Prince Albert*) financed by Lady Franklin; sledge on Somerset Island to Fury Beach.
  - East: William Penny (*Lady Franklin* and *Sophia*)
  - East: John Ross (schooner *Felix*)
  - East: Edwin de Haven (USS *Rescue*, USS *Advance*) = First Grinnell Expedition

- **1851:** William Kennedy (*Prince Albert* again) finds Bellot Strait proving that Somerset Island is an island.
- **1852:**
  - Edward Augustus Inglefield in northern Baffin Bay.
  - Edward Belcher in five ships; much sledge exploration; rescues McClure; 4 ships abandoned in the ice. Bredalbane crushed by ice.
  - Elisha Kane led the Second Grinnell Expedition
  - Boat expedition up the Wellington Channel under the command of R. M'Cormick, R.N., in HMB *Forlorn Hope*
- **1854:** John Rae learns where Franklin lost his ship.
- **1855:** Anderson and Stewart descend the Back River and find relics in Chantry Inlet.
- **1857:** Francis Leopold McClintock finds relics at King William Island, including a ship's boat on runners containing two corpses.
- **1869:** Charles Francis Hall at King William Island
- **1875:** Allen Young blocked at Peel Sound
- **1878:** Frederick Schwatka at King William Island

*Source:* Adapted from: Wikipedia contributors. (2018, August 19). Franklin's lost expedition. In Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Retrieved 22:30, August 22, 2018, from [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Franklin's\\_lost\\_expedition&oldid=855645032](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Franklin's_lost_expedition&oldid=855645032)

## SCOPE & CONTENT

The collection consists of five nautical charts, detailing the search for Franklin and one broadside for Captain Austin's expedition in search of Sir John Franklin.

## ARRANGEMENT

No original arrangement is apparent as the materials are published. The collection has been arranged into series by format.

## LANGUAGES

English

## RELATED MATERIALS

See also a collection of rare books relating to Sir John Franklin also donated by Mr. Sessions.

## RESTRICTIONS

**Access:** By permission of the archivist.

## RELATED VESSELS

HMS *Erebus* ; HMS *Terror*

## LC SUBJECT HEADINGS

Arctic regions

Search and rescue operations--Arctic regions

Arctic regions--Discovery and exploration--British

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## Collection Contents

### Sir John Franklin collection

#### Series 1: Charts (5 records)

Series consists of charts primarily relating to the search for Sir John Franklin's lost expedition. The charts include the charted courses taken by various search parties including McClure, Austen, Penny, Rae, Kennedy, Bellot, Inglefield and Belcher.

- C. 6. Chart shewing the North West Passage discovered by Capt. R. LeM. McClure... Discoveries in the Arctic Sea, between Baffin Bay & Melville Island; Chart of the North-West Passage discovered by Capt. McClure H.M.S. *Investigator* 1850-1853 The Arctic shores of America and part of Asia...

Discoveries in the Arctic Sea up to MDCCCLIV

**Series 2: Broadside** (1 record)

Series consists of one broadside.

Captain Austin's expedition in search of Sir John Franklin