The Royal Marines on Franklin's last expedition

Ralph Lloyd-Jones
Fulham Library, 598 Fulham Road, London SW6 5NX

Received March 2004

ABSTRACT. Using methods developed by family history researchers, it is possible to discover a remarkable amount about the individual lives of many men involved in Sir John Franklin's last fatal attempt to discover a Northwest Passage. This work constitutes what might be called 'the social history' of Franklin studies, relevant to that voyage in particular, and the early Victorian navy in general. Light is shed upon the lives of the Royal Marines aboard both HMS *Erebus* and HMS *Terror*, men who sailed and died with Franklin.

Contents

Introduction 319
Sources 319
Recruitment 320
Franklin's marines 321
William Braine 324
Conclusions 325
References 326

Introduction

The Royal Marines trace their origins back to 'sea service' soldiers raised by Charles II in 1664, although the present unit has only officially been a permanent part of Britain's armed forces since 1755 (Chichester and Burges-Short 1900: 895, 897). Since the Second World War the Royal Marines have taken on the status of an élite (Commando) rapid deployment unit, but they were originally conceived simply as shipboard infantry coming under the command of naval officers. They wore red coats with white facings, black shakoes (tall leather helmets), and were equipped exactly like foot soldiers of the army. Their most obvious role, familiar from paintings of Napoleonic naval engagements, was to fire small arms at the personnel of enemy vessels, although they might also be deployed by a ship's commander on land, as the need arose. More significant, but less apparent, was their task of enforcing discipline amongst the crews of the ships on which they served — as a last resort, marines might find themselves acting in a police capacity to protect a captain and his loyalists from mutineers. This is a drastic scenario, but there is circumstantial evidence that it may have some relevance to the Franklin saga. Their main armament in the 1840s would have been the 'Brown Bess' muzzle-loading, smoothbore musket that been in use since the early eighteenth-century era of Marlborough. Unlike the United States Marine Corps, the Royal Marines do not constitute an independent fighting force: they have always been part of the Royal Navy. This is reflected in the fact that the basis of this research — their records in Britain's National Archives (Public Record Office) — are classified 'ADM' (Admiralty).

It was established practice long before the Franklin expedition set sail for marines to be included amongst polar discovery crews. For example, when *Erebus* served as James Clark Ross' flagship in the 1839–43 Antarctic expedition, her complement included a sergeant and seven privates (Muster Book: ADM 38/8045). During William Parry's second Arctic voyage (*Fury* and *Hecla*, 1821–23), Captain G.F. Lyon recorded the effect of such men on friendly Inuit: 'The gay appearance of the marines, such, even in this climate, is the attractive influence of a red coat, so delighted the ladies, that they all danced and shouted in an ecstacy of pleasure as each soldier passed before them' on church parade (quoted in Savours 1999: 111).

By 1845 the Royal Marines comprised four divisions, each on paper consisting of about 2500 men subdivided into companies of around 100. The divisions were based at Chatham, Woolwich, Plymouth, and Portsmouth. Those who served on *Erebus* and *Terror* were all drawn from the Woolwich Division, which is not surprising, as the ships were equipped there. Altogether there were 13 officers, three warrant officers (boatswain, carpenter, and engineer), and 45 crewmen on Franklin's *Erebus*. Including himself, on *Terror* Captain Crozier commanded 11 officers, three warrant officers of the same ranks as on *Erebus*, and a ship's company of 44. In addition there were seven Royal Marines on each ship. Both Royal Marine units included a sergeant and corporal (non-commissioned officers), the rest being privates.

Sources

The Attestation Forms (that is, enlistment papers) of nine of these 14 men have been discovered — all but one from HMS *Terror* and three more, one particularly significant, from *Erebus*. The other primary source was several large volumes known as 'Description Books,' which were exactly that, they literally describe sergeants, corporals, and private marines, no doubt coming in useful if a man attempted to desert. They contain most of the information recorded in the attestations, including height, colour of hair and eyes, complexion, and even distinguishing marks such as tattoos. Thanks to them, there is a remarkable insight into the physical appearance of nearly every one of those mid-nineteenth-century men who never returned from the Arctic (13 out of 14 have been found). Examination of this material, plus other surviving relevant documents, such as parish registers, greatly illuminates what might be termed 'the social background' to the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0032247404003808 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Franklin Northwest Passage expedition in particular, the early Victorian navy in general.

The point of departure for this research is the 'List of officers & crew in Sir John Franklin's ships' (ADM 7/187). It was actually drawn up by the Wages Office of the Admiralty on 11 January 1853, but was based on Muster Books dated 30 June 1845 (ADM 38/0672 for *Erebus*; 38/1962 for *Terror*). These were brought back by Lieutenant Edward Griffiths, commander of the transport ship *Baretto Junior*, who left *Erebus* and *Terror* on July 12, taking exactly a month to return home. By coincidence, that 30 June is also the date of the only message in a cylinder ever found thrown overboard from HMS *Erebus*, and it was the day they crossed the Arctic Circle (Cyriax 1939: 60–61). In his seminal work, Richard J. Cyriax reproduced a bare list of the names of officers and crews, adding the dates of officers' promotions (Cyriax 1939: 28–31). A more recent book contained an appendix with the age and place of birth of each crewman, marines included (Beardsley 2002: 245–249). Given three facts — a name, a place, and a date — it is possible to find out a great deal more about people from the mid-nineteenth century, especially with the benefit of detailed Admiralty records. Further research is being conducted into the Muster Books themselves, which can be used to trace the careers of many seamen; this can be done because they record in which immediately previous ship a sailor had served. It is therefore possible to work backwards and reconstruct an entire naval career. Unfortunately this method is not possible with the marines, who were all only listed as having boarded *Erebus* and *Terror* at Woolwich on 13 March 1845. This was roughly halfway through their fitting out, which began in early February and was 'almost completed by the end of April' (Cyriax 1939: 54).

The average age of all the Marines was 31 years, 6 months old. That compares with a significantly younger average age amongst the sailors of both crews: only 28. Bearing in mind that officers were not included in these statistics, the youngest three sailors were 18, the oldest 46 (David MacDonald, quartermaster on *Terror*). The oldest marine, Private 1st Class Robert Hopcraft, was 38 years, 8 months old in June 1845; the youngest, Private 3rd Class William Reed, was exactly 10 years younger. The age difference between marines and sailors is important because, remembering their disciplinary role, experience and reliability were required of the former, strength and physical fitness being wanted most amongst the latter group. Another qualification was that volunteers should not be married. This prerequisite for going on such a potentially dangerous voyage seems confirmed by parish registers, where records of the baptism of several babies who grew up to serve with Franklin have been found, as well as, in some cases, their parents' marriage. Yet nothing has come to light to suggest that any of the ships' companies, including these marines, were married.

Recruitment

For two centuries, from around the time of George Farquhar's still-performed play *The recruiting officer* (1707) until the First World War, Britain's armed forces were almost always raised in the same way: by public voluntary enlistment. An exception occurred during the French Revolutionary (1793–1804) and Napoleonic (1805–15) wars, when some forced conscription did occur, particularly that of experienced seamen by naval press gangs. In peacetime, however, an army, Royal Navy, or Royal Marine recruiting party — usually led by an officer, but sometimes by a non-commissioned officer as low as the rank of corporal — would appear in a market town looking for volunteers. The recruiters gained a small pay bonus for every man they brought in. Their best hope, especially in the early nineteenth century as the Industrial Revolution took hold — machinery rapidly replacing manpower in agriculture as well as in skilled manufacture — would seem to have been amongst unemployed farm labourers. This theory is partly confirmed by the backgrounds of Franklin's marines, although several appear to have been relatively literate and one or two possessed skills that must have been acquired through apprenticeships. (It remains to be seen whether that was the case with the able-bodied seamen aboard *Erebus* and *Terror*.)

The popular idea of a man being somehow tricked into 'taking the king's shilling,' thereby owing something in return and thus obliged to join up, should be dismissed. Certainly recruiting parties were based at inns or public houses and appeared convivial, but they were hardly likely to draw attention to any miseries of military life. Those who, like Franklin's marines, signed on in the 1830s stood to gain a generous initial bounty of £3. Attempts to translate historical sums of money into modern terms always fail because so many variables have to be taken into account, but at a time when £20 a year was a reasonable working-class income, that £3 would clearly seem an attractive proposition to any unemployed labourer. The actual sequence of events was that the man agreed to join. He was then given at least 24 hours and up to four days to consider his decision before taking an oath of attestation. Between 1829 and 1847, when all but one of the 14 who would serve on the final voyage of *Erebus* and *Terror* joined, the attester promised 'Unlimited Service,' that is, for life, before a magistrate. (One may assume that a large percentage dropped out during the consideration stage, but it seems perfectly fair and presumably ensured a genuine commitment amongst those who went ahead.) The magistrate asked various questions, including whether the volunteer was already a member of the militia, 'Army, or the Marines, Ordnance, or Navy?' This concern of the armed forces — which still applies today — namely, that nobody should desert one unit only to go and hide in another, is understandable. Having answered the questions, the Victorian volunteer took (and today's equivalent still takes) an oath 'to bear true Allegiance to Her Majesty, Her Heirs, and Successors' and to 'honestly and faithfully defend Her Majesty, Her Heirs, and Successors, in Person, Crown and Dignity, against all Enemies' as well as to 'observe and obey all Orders' of the head of state 'and of the Generals and Officers set over me.' This was printed on

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0032247404003808 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the attestation document with a space to insert the man's name. He also signed it, or left 'his mark' if illiterate. Articles of War relevant to mutiny and desertion were read to him, the consequences of which would be to 'suffer Death or such other Punishment as by a Court-martial shall be inflicted.' The man was then examined by a surgeon who signed a certificate to declare him healthy and free from such horrors as 'Varicose Veins of the Legs . . . Scrofulous Affection of the Glands, Scald Head or other inveterate Cutaneous Eruptions.' At that point he was attested and part of the £3 bounty was handed over, usually 2/6. No doubt this allowed the recruit to pass urgently needed cash to relatives or creditors. The catch with the seemingly generous bounty lay in the fact that the rest of it was not given until one reached the divisional depot; some then came in the non-cash form of 'necessaries' — rather a shabby trick on the part of the authorities.

Franklin's marines

First alphabetically and the oldest marine on *Terror* was Private 1st Class William Aitken, who was baptised at St Nicholas' Church, Kenilworth in Warwickshire, on 14 August 1808, the parish register giving his details as 'William Aitkin [sic] son of James and Ann' (*International Genealogical Index*). It is known from parish registers dating back to the mid-sixteenth century that, except in the case of religious nonconformists (considered below), for generations working-class families would name the eldest child after his father. So the fact that he did not share his father's Christian name almost certainly indicates that Aitken was not his parents' eldest child. He joined the Royal Marines, aged 21, at the neighbouring county town of Worcester on 4 December 1829. He had already acquired the skilled trade of 'comb cutter,' that is, someone who could make the carding combs used for 'opening out the fibres of wool so that the fleece is completely disentangled and every fibre is free and even' (Jenkins 1977: 77). This was exactly the kind of small-scale specialist manufacture that was at that time being replaced by industrial processes, as water-driven carding engines took over and 'in all parts of Britain fewer and fewer people became concerned with domestic carding in cottages and farmhouses' (Jenkins 1977: 77). It should also be noted that, like the majority of the 14 Royal Marines, he enlisted in winter, when there was even less demand for his traditional skills. He was literate enough to sign his name 'Will^{m} Aitken' with a flourish, although shakily, and worse the second time when he confirmed that he had 'Received of Captain Pilcher Two Shillings and Sixpence on being attested.' In an unusually generous case, he was later advanced another 7/6 by the captain 'for necessaries,' although he did not receive the final balance of his £3 bounty until 23 July the following year. By then he was at the HQ Depot in Woolwich. He was described as being 5 feet 8 inches tall, of fair complexion, with hazel eyes and dark brown hair (ADM 157/21: 245).

Like Private William Braine and Solomon Tozer, sergeant on board *Terror*, Sergeant Daniel Bryant of *Erebus* came from Somerset. He was born in the village of Shepton Montague in 1814. Although two of the privates (Aitken and Hopcraft) were older, Bryant had served the longest, having enlisted in Woolwich on 30 October 1828. This was in fact before 'unlimited' engagement was reintroduced, although it seems that he voluntarily remained beyond the seven years obliged by law between 1807 and 1829 (Farwell 1981: 81). Bryant was given a most generous bounty of £4, receiving 10 shillings of it immediately on attestation. This was an advantage of enlisting at the headquarters site of the unit's pay office. The other £3 10*s* in money and necessaries were given only two days later, on 1 November. His trade was recorded as 'weaver.' Throughout the eighteenth century almost every man, woman, and child in some communities could be described as such, stocking frame weaving being the commonest cottage industry. Five years before Bryant enlisted, the entrepreneur Richard Guest wrote *A compendious history of the cotton manufacture*, in which he observed that previously:

> all the operations, from the dressing of the raw material to its being finally turned out in the state of cloth, were completed under the roof of the weaver's cottage. The course of improved manufacture which followed, was to spin the yarn in factories and to weave it in cottages. At the present time, when the manufacture has attained a mature growth, all the operations, with vastly increased means and more complex contrivances, are again performed in a single building. The weaver's cottage with its rude apparatus of peg warping, hand cards, hand wheels, and imperfect looms, was the steam loom factory in miniature. (Guest 1823: 515)

This explains why Bryant and tens of thousands of other frame weavers were obliged to find a new source of income; steam looms in factories had replaced them. He was exceptional in having gone to the headquarters to enlist, no doubt after failing to find any other work in London. Unfortunately there is no record of his 17 years' service between 1828 and the Franklin expedition, but it must have been exemplary to reach so a high non-commissioned rank. His career was probably similar to that of Sergeant Tozer, described below. On the outside sheet of his attestation papers (ADM 157/19: 631), which include his signature 'Danyel Bryant,' in faded red ink there appears the official 'D D,' a formula going back to Elizabethan times, which stands for 'Discharged Dead.' In the relevant Description Book, the right-hand 'Discharge' column has, in neat copperplate writing, 'Supposed D D in the Arctic Expedition under Sir John Franklin – Wages paid up to 31st March 1854' (ADM 158/37).

Private 3rd Class James Daly was one of two Irishmen amongst Franklin's marines. He was on HMS *Terror*, whereas his compatriot, William Pilkington, served on *Erebus*. Daly came from Tubberclue, a village in County Westmeath, the very centre of Ireland, where he was born in February 1814. Yet it was in England, at Birmingham, that he enlisted on 15 December 1838. He was another of Captain Pilcher's recruits and was at Woolwich to receive the balance of his bounty by 19 December. Although only

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0032247404003808 Published online by Cambridge University Press

described as a 'Labourer,' he was literate and signed his papers (ADM 157/31: 214). He was 5 feet 9 1/2 inches tall, of dark complexion, with black hair and grey eyes.

John Hammond, another Private 3rd Class on *Terror*, came from the parish of Calverly, Bradford, in the West Riding of Yorkshire. He enlisted in Manchester on 28 January 1832 attesting two days later, aged 19. An illiterate labourer, he could only sign with an 'X.' He was also recruited by 'Captain Pilcher's party,' which had taken William Aitken in Worcester three years before and would enlist James Daly six years later. One wonders whether, when the full extent of the Franklin disaster became apparent in the 1850s, Pilcher was aware of his indirect responsibility for the presence of more than one victim? It seems unlikely. By 16 February the captain had marched his recruits down to Woolwich, where Hammond was given the £2 17*s* 6*d* outstanding from his attestation of 2/6. He was assigned to No. 8 Company of the 4th Division, the company that eventually provided most of Franklin's marines. He was 5 feet 10 inches tall, fair-complexioned with grey eyes and light brown hair (ADM 157/24: 263).

Joseph Healey, Private 3rd Class on HMS *Erebus*, came from the parish of Middleton, Manchester, and joined the Royal Marines in his home town at the age of 19 on 29 April 1834. He, too, was a weaver, having brown hair, grey eyes, and a fair complexion. Although his attestation papers have not been traced, he appears in two Description Books (ADM 158/48, 158/49). Both of them record in miniscule handwriting the striking detail that Healey had 'Seven stars [tattooed] on the back of [his] left wrist.'

Private 1st Class William Heather came closest to being a Londoner, being born in 1810 in Battersea, then still a village beside the Thames in Surrey. When a man was discharged from the marines a record of service was sometimes attached to his original attestation papers and filed away. On the Franklin expedition, where everyone on both ships perished in mysterious circumstances, one can hardly dare hope to find such interesting information. Yet the case of William Heather is extremely lucky because someone, presumably an officious pay clerk, took the trouble to write much of his career in at the end of the attestation documents (ADM 157/21: 199). The uniquely detailed record must perforce be taken as representative of the type of service that any of Franklin's 14 marines might have experienced, bearing in mind that although at least three of them (Aitken, Bryant, and Hopcraft) had joined in the late 1820s, Heather had already served for a decade and a half by 1845.

Having attested at Sevenoaks in Kent on 24 February 1830, Heather was posted to HMS *Prince Regent*, a first-rate, 120-gun ship of the line, on 5 April 1831. No doubt the 14 months in between were spent on basic training at the Chatham headquarters. He remained with *Prince Regent*, commanded by Captain (later Admiral) J.W.D. Dundas (1785–1862), nearly another year until 9 February 1832. *Prince Regent* was not a very exciting posting as she had just returned from two years in Portuguese waters and the ship remained at Sheerness (that is, the Royal Navy base in the mouth of the Thames) for the whole period Heather was aboard. In two years of service in the Royal Marines, Heather had been nowhere more exotic than Kent. That changed when he was sent to Portsmouth to join HMS *Castor* (5th-rate frigate, 36 guns), which had just been built at Chatham for another distinguished officer, Captain the Right Honourable Lord John Hay (1793–1851). Lord John and Private Heather were to remain attached to this ship in the *Navy List* for the unusually long period of five years. This was because they, along with the 6th-rate, 28-gun *North Star* and the innovative steam paddle sloop *Phoenix* sailed to the Lisbon/Portugal Station just at the time when Britain intervened in civil war in neighbouring Spain.

When King Ferdinand VII died in 1833, his widow, Maria Christina, was appointed regent to her daughter Isabella. The late king's brother, Don Carlos, supported by much of the Spanish army, claimed the throne. In a remarkable parallel with the Spanish Civil War of the 1930s, the legitimate regency government recruited Portuguese, French, and British volunteer legions to supplement its lack of manpower. According to Thompson (2000: 37–38): 'the British Legion, around 10,000 strong, consisted of infantry, cavalry, and artillery. It was recruited in Britain, but was part of and paid for by the Spanish forces, and the leading units arrived in Spain in mid-1835.' Fortunately for these amateur soldiers and the royal ladies of Spain, the British government actively intervened to the extent of providing 10 companies of Royal Marines plus artillery. Although seven companies (about 700 men) were sent from England, the other three were drawn from the local Royal Navy squadron and must have included Private Heather. It is therefore certain that he — and not unlikely some of the other veteran marines who later served with Franklin — took part in the siege of Bilbao, where Lord John Hay was in command, as well as two major engagements.

> The Royal Marines battalion distinguished itself at the Battle of Oriamendi. The British Legion broke and fled under surprise attack by the Carlists, and only the Royal Marines standing their ground, and covering the retreat of their fellow countrymen, prevented the Carlists from cutting the fleeing British to pieces. The Legion did better at Hernani, where again the Royal Marines gave them another example of steadiness by repulsing four times their number . . . Although the British Legion was disbanded in 1837, the Royal Marines did not leave Spain until 1840. (Thompson 2000: 38)

Lord John (who transferred to *Phoenix* in November 1836 and *North Star* in March the following year), *Castor*, and William Heather, however, returned home in 1837. Heather disembarked from that ship on 9 February, five years to the day that he left *Prince Regent*. The only other information until he boarded HMS *Terror* on 13 March

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0032247404003808 Published online by Cambridge University Press

1845 was the prosaic news that 'Clothing & Cap' (that is, a new uniform) were 'due Ap[l] 1838.' That was written in on his attestation documents, but the reason these details were provided is to be deduced from the Description Books. There it mentioned, again in the smallest possible script, that he was 'Transferred from Ch[atha]m 10 Aug[t] 1837' (ADM 158/48). It was this transfer from one division to another that led to the recording of his entire career with the original unit, no one realising how interesting that information would prove two centuries later. The one remaining fact, written in now very faint red ink, appears on the front fold of his attestation papers: 'D D With Expedition under Sir John Franklin' (ADM 157/29: 196).

The corporal on HMS *Terror* was William Hedges, who had been born at Bradford-on-Avon, Wiltshire in 1815. He enlisted at Bath in the neighbouring county of Somerset, aged 18 years, 3 months, on 1 September 1834. Although his attestation papers have not come to light, the relevant Description Books (ADM 158/48, 158/49) reveal that he was a butcher, a trade in which he must have failed if he felt obliged to join the marines. He was 5 feet 8 inches tall and had brown hair with hazel eyes and a fair complexion. One of the books mentions that, for the purposes of pay, he was promoted *in absentia* to sergeant on 20 May 1848.

Oldest of all the marines was Robert Hopcraft (of HMS *Erebus*), born in October 1807 (ADM 7/187: 7). There are parallels between him and Aitken. He actually joined up a few months earlier, July 1829, in his home-town of Nottingham. It seems, however, that he was the eldest son of the family, for although his baptism has not yet been traced there is a record of the marriage of a Robert Hopcraft to Ann Burnham at Nottingham's parish church, St Mary's, on 22 July 1806 (*International Genealogical Index*). It is a relatively unusual name and they were almost certainly his parents. Like his fellow-Midlander Aitken, Hopcraft junior had acquired a skilled textile-associated trade, that of 'Needlemaker,' by the time of his enlistment, aged 22. Again, this is exactly the sort of qualification that was then being made redundant by the advance of industrialisation. He was given half-a-crown upon attestation on 15 July and another 3/6 on the 22nd, when they were still in Nottingham. He also signed that he had 'Received the sum of three pounds in Money and Necessaries being the amount of my Bounty' at Woolwich on 1 August, although presumably the six shillings that he had already been advanced were deducted. He was 5 feet 10 inches tall with a fair complexion, grey eyes and brown hair (ADM 157/21: 306).

Unfortunately neither the attestation papers nor any mention in Description Books of *Erebus'* Marine Corporal 3rd Class Alexander Paterson have been found. This is not for want of trying, including the consideration of alternative spellings such as 'Patterson.' The Christian name 'Alexander,' then almost exclusively Scottish, should also have stood out. It may be that he went by another name, as there are examples of this including Samuel Brown *alias* Hardy, bosun's mate on the same ship. So all that is known about Paterson is that he was born in Inverness in the month of Waterloo, June 1815.

Private 3rd Class William Pilkington was, like James Daly, an Irishman, although he served on *Erebus*. He was from the port of Kilrush, County Clare, on the mouth of the Shannon in the west of Ireland, where he was born in February 1817. Like three fellow marines (Hedges, Reed, and Tozer), he enlisted in Bath, only 10 weeks after Hedges, on 12 November 1834. He was therefore 17 years and 9 months old; however they put him down as 18. Not that age mattered much. Although a fighting soldier should appear at least 18, drummers in the 1830s could join as young as 11 (yet at least one who saw action in the Napoleonic Wars had been just seven when he joined). Pilkington was described as being 5 feet 8 inches tall and having had dark brown hair, hazel eyes, and a 'Sallow' complexion. In the column normally reserved for 'Former Service' somebody has written '12 Nov. 1850,' 15 years to the day since he attested: time for promotion and a pay rise (ADM 158/62).

Private 3rd Class William Reed of HMS *Erebus* was 19 when he enlisted at Bath on 16 July 1835. He was originally from the parish of St Augustine's, Bristol, and had been apprenticed to a shoemaker. He, too, was 5 feet 8 inches tall, with dark brown hair, hazel eyes, and a complexion described as 'Fresh' (ADM 158/64). In another Description Book, the date '16 July [18]50' appeared under 'Former Service' and it was noted that he was 'supposed to have died in the Arctic expedition under Sir J[no] Franklin' (ADM 158/65).

The sergeant on *Terror* was a third Somerset man, Solomon Tozer, born at Axbridge, near Cheddar in the north of that county in 1815. The unusual Christian name suggests that he may have been a nonconformist; perhaps a Congregationalist like Abraham Seely, a sailor on the same ship. There is a discrepancy about Tozer's age because when he attested at Bath on 29 August 1833 it was recorded as '18 Years & 2 months' (ADM 157/26: 68), but in the 1853 'List of officers & crew' (ADM 7/187: 7) his age in 1845 was given as 34, which would mean that he was born in 1811. As the age '18 and two 12ths' remains in both description books that mention Tozer, it may be assumed that it is correct, although it was, of course, based on the original attestation. Most interestingly for a senior non-commissioned officer is the record of his promotions. Although originally in the 24th Company, by 1837 — when Victoria was crowned and the armed forces were reorganised into a 'New Establishment' — he had already reached the rank of corporal in the 4th Company. He was promoted to sergeant on 26 October 1844, now in the 48th Company. His final promotion, to colour sergeant, 'a reward for distinguished service' (Farwell 1981: 89), came when he now seems unlikely still to have been alive in the Arctic, 30 January 1849. In the same book (ADM 158/69) it was noted '27/28 Aug 1848' in the 'Former Service' column, again the date he had completed 15 years. So he had two to four years as a private, up to seven

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0032247404003808 Published online by Cambridge University Press

as a corporal and five as a sergeant. (Note that privates and corporals were classed, 1st being most senior, 3rd most junior; sergeants were not classed.) At the age of 18, Tozer was 5 feet 8 1/2 inches tall with light hair, hazel eyes, and a fair complexion. He was a carpenter by trade and, as befits one who reached the highest non-commissioned rank, had an extremely neat signature. A unique solecism recorded that he was 'D[ischarged] D[ead] North Pole [*sic*] expedition under Sir John Franklin' (ADM 158/69). He appears as a fairly major, brave, and practical character in Robert Edric's novel *The broken lands* (Edric 1992).

Last of the 14 alphabetically and last to join the Royal Marines was Henry Wilks. Despite having enlisted at Worcester on 7 April 1836, he had already served for the best part of a decade when the expedition sailed in 1845. This illustrates the fact that the men who went with Franklin were not the idealistic, inexperienced, innocent fools that some modern commentators would have them. During his previous nine years' service, Wilks may have fought alongside William Heather in Spain, or been at the capture of St Jean d'Acre and on active service in Syria and Egypt in 1840–41, when Britain intervened to support Ottoman Turkey against Egypt. He certainly would have experienced more of the world than if he had remained the illiterate stocking weaver from Leicester that he was when he attested on 8 April. His eyes were grey, hair dark brown, complexion fresh. He was at Woolwich, in the 16th Company, by 27 April.

William Braine

Private 3rd Class William Braine was only 19 when he enlisted at Yeovil, Somerset, on Christmas Eve 1833. He was either mistaken or he lied when he gave his age as 20, but he was born in the village of Oakhill near Shepton Mallet in the same county in March 1814. His attestation papers (ADM 157/25: 55) are unique amongst the nine sets found in that he was originally recruited to the Plymouth Division based in the neighbouring county of Devon. There is, furthermore, some information filled in on his 'Record of Service,' which is unusual. It was written because he was transferred to Woolwich, a move that sealed his ultimate fate and ensured a macabre kind of immortality for an illiterate labourer who joined the marines. The Record of Service states that he was 'Pr^{t} from 24 Dec 1833 to 23 July 1834 – 7 months' and that his 'Name does not appear in court martial or defaulters book.' This information is dated 'H^{d} Q^{r} Plymouth 3 August 1846' — four months since Private Braine had died and been buried, although nobody in England was yet aware of it. The explanation for this record is that, more than a year into the voyage, Admiralty bureaucrats, concerned to keep up-to-date with the pay records of Franklin's men, traced Braine's enlistment back to his original unit. The attestation papers were found — and the fact that Braine had spent seven months with the Plymouth Division was written in.

In March 1850 Captain William Penny discovered three well-constructed graves on Beechy Island at 74°44′N, 91°55′W (Traill 1896: 386). One of the tombstones was inscribed:

> Sacred to the memory of William Braine, R.M. of H.M.S. *Erebus*, died April 3rd, 1846, aged thirty-two years. 'Choose ye this day whom ye will serve,' Joshua, xxiv, 15. (Cyriax 1939: 107)

This partial verse from the Bible — slightly misquoted — would have been approved, if not personally selected, by Franklin himself. It is striking and, at first glance, seems to suggest that there may have been dissent amongst the men spending their first Arctic winter at Beechy Island. That theory might be sustained if it were a case of Joshua admonishing mutinous troops. In fact the whole verse reads:

> And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

Whether or not Braine had expressed any religious doubts as his death approached, this is definitely an example of the evangelical Franklin beseeching his surviving men to look to their souls.

In June 1986 Braine's body was exhumed and examined by the University of Alberta's Owen Beattie, Walt Kowal, James Savelle, Roger Amy, and Eric Damkjar (Beattie and Geiger 1987). Although Beattie's book about this (and the other two Beechy Island exhumations that had taken place two years earlier) contains an entire chapter entitled 'The Royal Marine,' documents pertinent to Braine's life have only come to light with the research for this paper, revealing far more than autopsy alone achieved. For example, an interpretation of the copper plaque on Braine's coffin is now able to be made more accurately. The plaque reads:

W. BRAINE
R.M.8 CO. W.D
H.M.S. EREBUS
DIED APRIL 3rd 1846
AGED
33
YEARS

It will now be observed that 'W.D' stands for *Woolwich Division*, a fact that Beattie failed to explain. (Many people on reading it might simply assume 'War Department,' which would be wrong.) Another notable fact about William Braine is recorded in one of the Description Books: '9 March 1844 Run from Furlough' (ADM 158/37). This is a standard formula to say that he had exceeded a period of leave. It may explain why, after more than a decade's service, he was still only Private 3rd Class. It is certainly the first definite evidence that shows that Franklin's men were not selected for being exemplary plaster saints.

As with any organic matter buried in permafrost, Braine's body was in a remarkable state of preservation despite the fact that it had lain there for 140 years. This

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0032247404003808 Published online by Cambridge University Press



Fig. 1. Star badge from a marine shako, as would have been worn by the Royal Marines on *Erebus* and *Terror*.

makes it interesting to compare Beattie's description of Braine's mortal remains with Captain Coker's description of the man when he enlisted. 'He would have stood 181 centimetres (nearly 6 feet) tall,' wrote Beattie and Geiger (1987: 149), whereas the recruiting officer gave a very specific height of 5 feet 10 1/2 inches. This discrepancy is not as serious as it might seem, bearing in mind that he was only 19 when he joined up, so it is perfectly possible that he was still growing. More difficult to explain is that the attestation papers give his hair colour as 'Light Brown' (ADM 157/25: 55), whereas in 1986 it was found to be 'nearly black' (Beattie and Geiger 1987: 150). Either it had darkened as he grew older in life, or it was discoloured by some chemical process that occurred in the grave. Yet from a 1986 photograph Braine's corpse still appears to have had the grey eyes described in the living man of 1833. It is worth mentioning that the body, which was wrapped in a thin shroud and with a red handkerchief covering its face, was not dressed in the uniform one might expect, but wore a dark-blue navy broadcloth jacket. It was almost certainly the costume in which he died, although marines on duty, even in Arctic regions, would have worn their uniforms. This may be reflected in the fact that amongst the relics discovered at Point Victory by Lieutenant William Hobson in 1858 there was included the star badge from a marine shako (Fig. 1) (*The Illustrated London News* 15 October 1859: 363). This artefact cannot have been left there until at least April 1848 when Crozier abandoned the ships. The owner of the shako, perhaps originally Braine, must have been dead when it was abandoned.

From the 20th-century autopsy, Beattie noted: 'the extremely emaciated appearance of this man — literally a skin-covered skeleton. Braine would have weighed less than 40 kilograms [6 stone]' (Beattie and Geiger 1987: 150). Although Beattie was a keen advocate of the 'lead poisoning theory,' his emaciated state in death only proved that William Braine could not consume food during the last few weeks of his life. More significant was the information that, upon detailed laboratory analysis in Edmonton, Roger Amy 'identified tuberculosis in the lung tissue of William Braine' (Beattie and Geiger 1987: 159). The 1984 and 1986 autopsies strongly suggest that both Leading Stoker John Torrington (1826–46) and Braine (1814–46) died of TB, which is much more likely than that they suddenly succumbed to lead poisoning when others did not. Braine's attestation papers are unusual amongst those of Franklin's marines in that they have 'D[ischarged] D[ead] . . at Beechy Island –' written on the outside, presumably in 1851 when Penny returned with news of the graves. The authorities were thereby making a note that it was no longer necessary to pay or promote him.

Conclusions

What can be learned from the lives briefly described above? The purpose of this work is to fill in some of the true background to people who have hitherto merely appeared as dry lists of names, forensic archaeological subjects, or fictionalised characters.

There may not be pictures, but written physical descriptions do survive. Documents still exist that tell us exactly where and when Franklin's men were born and grew up. In many instances these will be places that are familiar to the modern reader. Simply from how well a man was able to sign his name, it is possible to determine the level of education he had reached. Although several (and not necessarily the illiterate) are described simply as 'labourers,' others had pursued trades in which, either for personal or perhaps for economic and technological reasons beyond their control, they had failed to make a living. All of them chose to serve as marines and almost all had at least a decade's experience — certainly involving hardship and, as seen, very probably combat — by the time they volunteered for Arctic service. As is shown by their performance in the Civil (Carlist) War in Spain, the Royal Marines of the 1830s were already a crack military unit, holding the line when others broke and ran. The Royal Navy, too, since its decisive victory over Napoleonic France and with continuing active service — for example in the ongoing suppression of the slave trade — was established as an elite.

These were the men who sailed with Franklin. Documents referring to individuals, in many cases their very signatures, have survived. By examining these papers, and by fitting them into the social and political developments of the times these people lived through, it is possible to 'put flesh upon bare bones.' All of this history lay untouched for the best part of two centuries, in many cases accumulating from the moment those men took their oaths

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0032247404003808 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of attestation and put pen to paper, happily unaware of the heroic and tragic fate that awaited them inside the Arctic Circle.

References

Beardsley, M. 2002. *Deadly winter: the life of Sir John Franklin*. London: Chatham Publishing.

Beattie, O., and J. Geiger. 1987. *Frozen in time: the fate of the Franklin expedition*. London: Bloomsbury.

Chichester, H.M., and G. Burges-Short. 1900. *The records and badges of every regiment and corps in the British Army*. London: Gale and Polden.

Cyriax, R.J. 1939. *Sir John Franklin's last Arctic expedition: the Franklin expedition, a chapter in the history of the Royal Navy*. Reprinted 1997, Plaistow and Sutton Coldfield: The Arctic Press.

Edric, R. 1992. *The broken lands*. London: Jonathan Cape.

Farquhar, G. 1707. *The recruiting officer*. Reprinted 1774, Edinburgh: J. Robertson.

Farwell, B. 1981. *Mr Kipling's army*. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company.

Guest, R. 1823. *A compendious history of the cotton manufacture*. Quoted in: Aspinall, A., and E.A. Smith (editors). 1959. *English historical documents*. Volume 11. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode.

International Genealogical Index. 1992. Microfiche. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

Jenkins, J.G. 1977. *Exploring country crafts*. East Ardsley, Wakefield: EP Publishing.

Savours, A. 1999. *The search for the North West Passage*. London: Chatham Publishing.

Thompson, J. 2000. *The Royal Marines: from sea soldiers to special service*. London: Sidgwick & Jackson.

Traill, H.D. 1896. *The life of Sir John Franklin, RN*. London: John Murray.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0032247404003808 Published online by Cambridge University Press