

EXCERPT

## A WIFE'S QUEST FOR ANSWERS

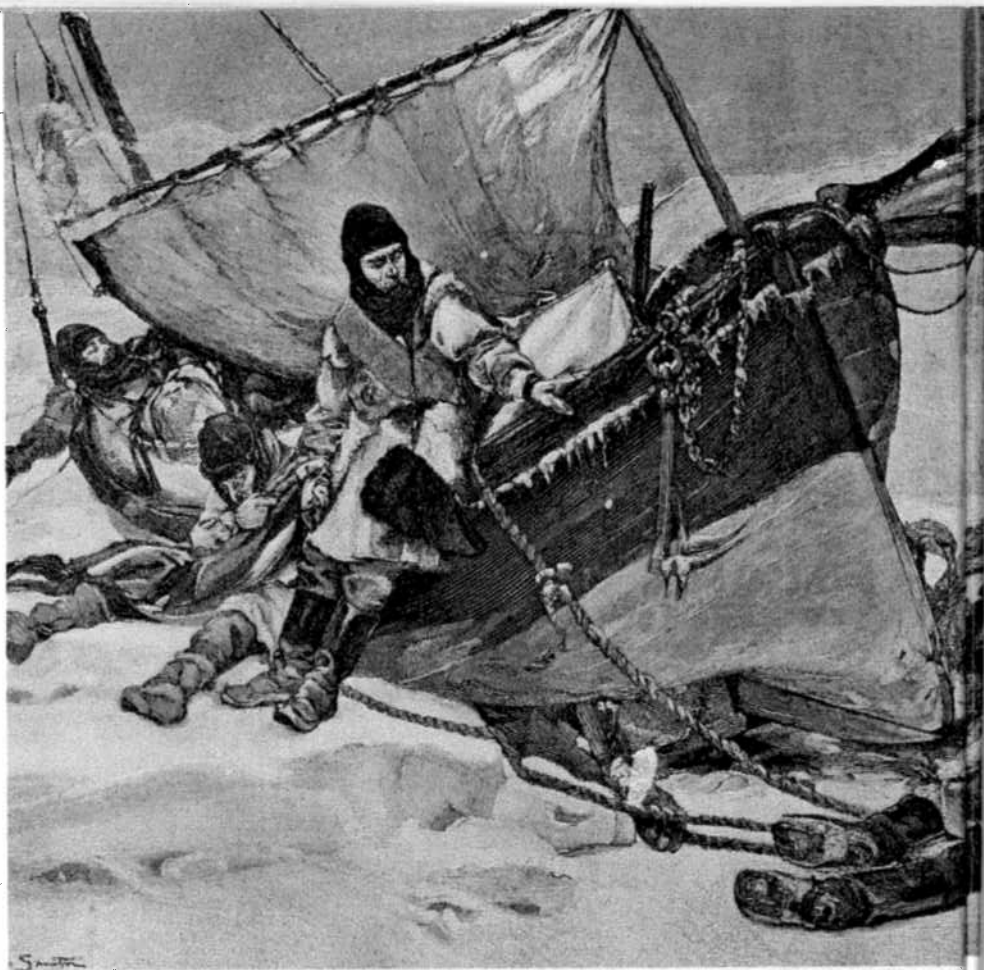
Lady Franklin launched one last 'exhaustive search' to find out where and when her beloved husband died

NINE YEARS HAD passed since Franklin set sail in 1845, and the Hudson's Bay Company had led two searches, both of which confirmed no one survived the expedition. England's attention turned to the Crimean War, but Franklin's widow could not rest. Lady Franklin hired Arctic veteran Francis M'Clintock, who had sailed with Franklin on three expeditions, to return with lieutenant William Hobson. *Frozen in Time* authors Owen Beattie and John Geiger say M'Clintock and Hobson vindicated Franklin in 1859, proving he died on board the ship, long before his crew's awful demise, and "close enough to his objective to have justified at least a moral claim to the prize: Discoverer of the Northwest Passage."

### BOOK EXCERPT

ON 20 APRIL (1859), M'Clintock encountered two Inuit families. He traded for Franklin relics in their possession and, upon questioning them, discovered that two ships had been seen but that one sank in deep water. The other was forced onto shore by the ice. On board they found the body of a very large man with "long teeth." They said that the "white people went away to the 'large river,' taking a boat or boats with them, and that in the following winter their bones were found there." Later, M'Clintock met up with a group of 30 to 40 Inuit who inhabited a snow village on King William Island. He purchased silver plate bearing the crests or initials of Franklin, Crozier and two other officers. One woman said "many of the white men dropped by the way as they went to the Great River; that some were buried and some were not."

M'Clintock reached the mainland and continued southward to Montreal Island, where a few relics, including a piece of a preserved meat tin, two pieces of iron hoop and other scraps of metal, were found. The sledge party then turned back to King William Island,



**Last days:** *The Erebus captain wrote Franklin died aboard one of the ships on June 11, 1847*

where they searched along its southern, then western coasts. Ghastly secrets awaited both M'Clintock and Hobson as they trudged over the snow-covered land.

Shortly after midnight on May 24, 1859, a human skeleton in the uniform of a steward from the lost expedition was found on a gravel ridge near the mouth of Peffer River on the island's southern shore. M'Clintock recorded the tragic scene in his journal:

*This poor man seems to have selected the bare ridge top, as affording the least tiresome walking, and to have fallen upon his face in the position in which we found him. It was a melancholy truth that the old woman spoke when she said, "they fell down and died as they walked along."*

M'Clintock believed the man had fallen asleep in this position and that his "last moments were undisturbed by suffering."

Alongside the bleached skeleton lay a "small clothes-brush near, and a horn pocket-comb, in which a few light-brown hairs still remained." There was also a notebook, which belonged to Harry Peglar, captain of the foretop on the Terror. The notebook contained the handwriting of two individuals, Peglar and an unknown second. In the hand of Peglar was a song lyric, dated April 21, 1847, which begins:

"The C the C the open C it grew so fresh the Ever free." A mystery, however, surrounds the other papers, written in the hand of the unknown and referring to the disaster. Most of the words in the messages were spelled backwards and ended with capital letters, as if the end were the beginning. One sheet of paper had a crude drawing of an eye, with the words "lid Bay" underneath. When corrected, another message reads: "Oh Death whare is thy sting, the grave at Comfort Cove for who has any douat how... the dyer sad..." On the other side of that paper, words were written in a circle, and inside the circle was the passage, "the terror camp clear." This has been interpreted as a place name, a reference to a temporary encampment made by the Franklin expedition—possibly the encampment at Beechey Island. Another paper, written in the same hand, also spelled backwards, includes this passage: "Has we have got some very hard ground to heave... we shall want some grog to wet houer... issel... all my art Tom for I do think... time... I cloze should lay and... the 21st night a gread." The "21st night" could be April 21, 1848, the eve of the desertion of the *Erebus* and *Terror*—a possibility raised because of another discovery. The most important artifact of the Franklin searches had been located three weeks before the skeleton was found, as Hobson surveyed the northwest coast of the island. On May 5,