

MysteryQuest43: Support Material (Activity Sheet 1) **Introducing the participants**

Sir John Franklin. Sir John Franklin came to the command of his third Arctic expedition at the age of 59. A seasoned naval officer who had fought in various battles commanded by Admiral Horatio Nelson, Franklin had commanded two previous Arctic expeditions when his ships departed England in 1845. After his narrow escape in his first expedition to the Arctic in 1819-22, during which he experienced severe hardships, he became known as “the man who ate his boots.” Following his Arctic service and other military assignments, he was appointed lieutenant governor of Van Diemen's Land, now the state of Tasmania in Australia.

Throughout his career he was an accomplished navigator and scientist, and he carried out extensive mapping and magnetic observations on all of his exploratory missions. Well-liked by his colleagues and a devout Christian, Franklin was known for his concern for the well-being of members of his exploration parties.

Was Sir John Franklin the right man for the job? Not everyone thought so at the time. Several senior officials privately expressed concern about Franklin's age (59 years old), his physical (portly), and his alleged intolerance of the cold. During the winter of 1844-45 Franklin had experienced a severe bout of influenza, which he acknowledged he was still suffering from even after the expedition departed in May 1845. Franklin did his best to counter these assertions and, in the end, Haddington gave the nod to the veteran Arctic explorer and experienced magnetic scientist.

Commander James Fitzjames. Third in command on the Arctic expedition, James Fitzjames was a career mariner although his naval experience was largely military rather than exploratory. He had served on various British naval campaigns in Syria, Egypt and China. When Fitzjames was appointed to the Arctic expedition, Franklin gave him responsibilities for overseeing the magnetic observations that were an important part of the expedition's objectives.

Fitzjames was also placed in charge of recruitment and staffing of the expedition personnel and in all 70 men signed up for HMS *Erebus* and 69 for the *Terror*. Fitzjames hired a mix of men with some prior experience on Arctic expeditions and many former shipmates with no Arctic experience. Only six of the Expedition's 18 officers had prior Arctic experience. Nine of the 101 non-commissioned crew members served previously on *Erebus* and *Terror* during its Antarctic cruise of 1839-43. Most of the party had some prior naval experience but 28 had never before served in the Royal Navy. Overall, it was one of the least experienced expeditions ever sent by the Admiralty, in terms of polar service, to the Arctic.

The British Government and Admiralty. Beginning in 1804, with the appointment of Sir John Barrow to the position of Second Secretary of the Admiralty, the British Royal Navy began pushing to find the Northwest Passage. Between 1804 and 1845, the British Admiralty sent a series of expeditions to explore and map the Arctic region. The Franklin Expedition of 1845 was intended to finally complete the Northwest Passage. The Admiralty's Sailing Orders or Instructions to Franklin provided an extensive list of objectives, some of which related to the

discovery of the Northwest Passage but others were oriented to science and specifically to geomagnetic observations. The Admiralty knew that science alone would be less likely to gain popular support as the rationale for the Expedition than the straightforward search for a Northwest Passage. Nevertheless, the Royal Society of London and several of the senior officers emphasized the potential for magnetic science alongside geographical discovery.