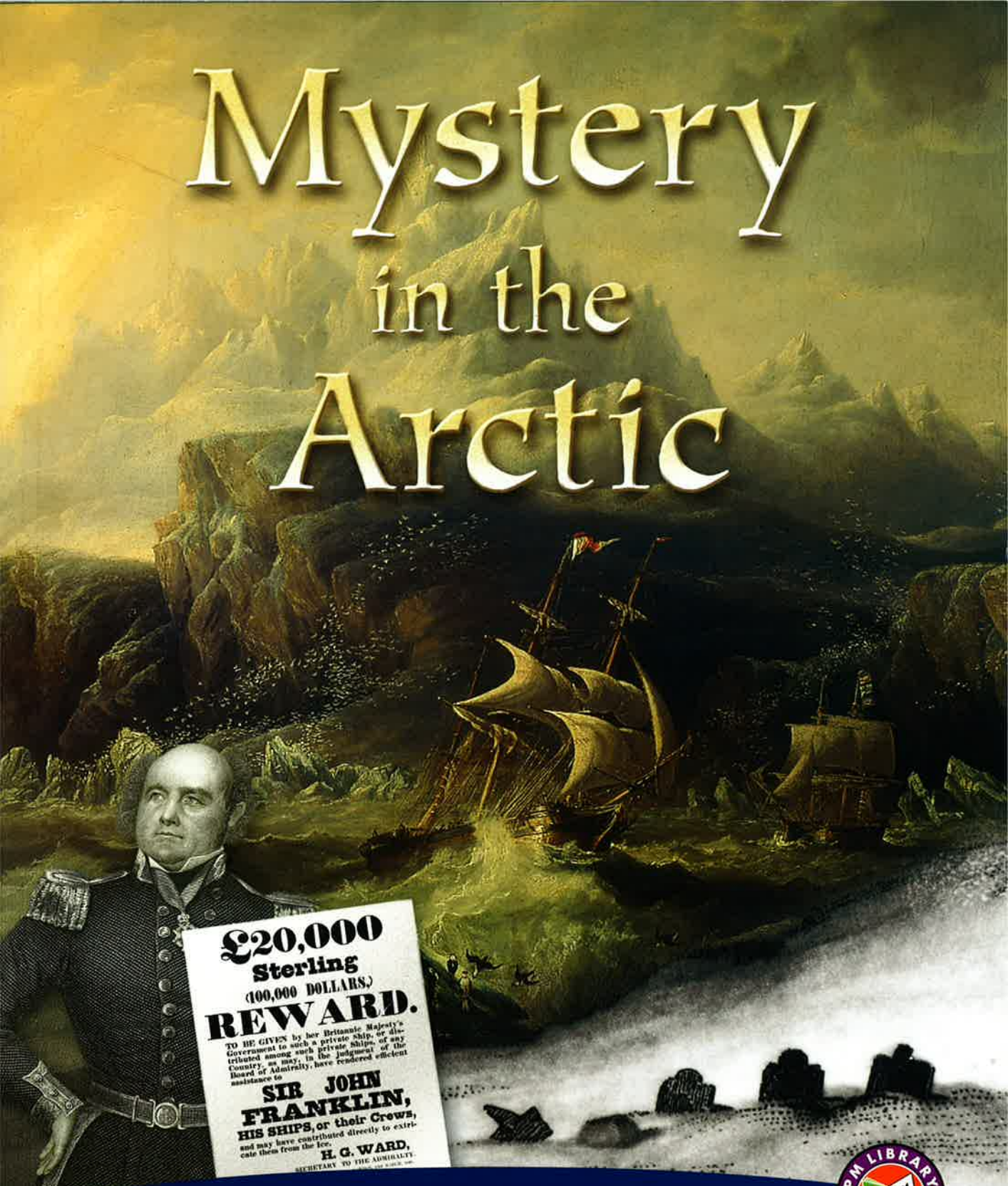
Mystery in the Arctic



Wendy Blaxland

PM LIBRARY

Contents

For teachers' inspection ONLY

The Mysterious Northwest Passage	4
Franklin the Explorer	6
The First Real Clues	12
Modern Researchers Suspect Poison	14
Uncovering the Evidence	18
Deadly Tin Cans	24
Preserving Food	26
The Inuit	28
The Mystery Is Solved	30
Glossary	32
Further Reading	32
Websites	32
Index	33

The Mysterious Northwest Passage

Footeachers' inspection ONLY

Since the end of the 15th century, famous explorers and navigators had been looking for a short cut in the sailing route from Europe in the Atlantic Ocean, through the Arctic Circle to the Pacific Ocean on the other side of America. They called this undiscovered route the Northwest Passage.

Ships had to sail 23,600 kilometres from Europe to Asia, travelling around the Horn of Africa. By cutting through the Arctic, the new route would save them nearly 12,000 kilometres.



This map shows the usual sailing route from Britain to Asia.



A 'bird's eye' view of the Arctic Circle.

The dangerous waters between northern Canada and the Arctic were filled with icebergs and rocky coastlines. Sir Francis Drake and James Cook were two explorers who had tried and failed to find the Northwest Passage. And at least one other voyage ended in tragedy: in 1583, Sir Humphrey Gilbert drowned while trying to find the Passage.

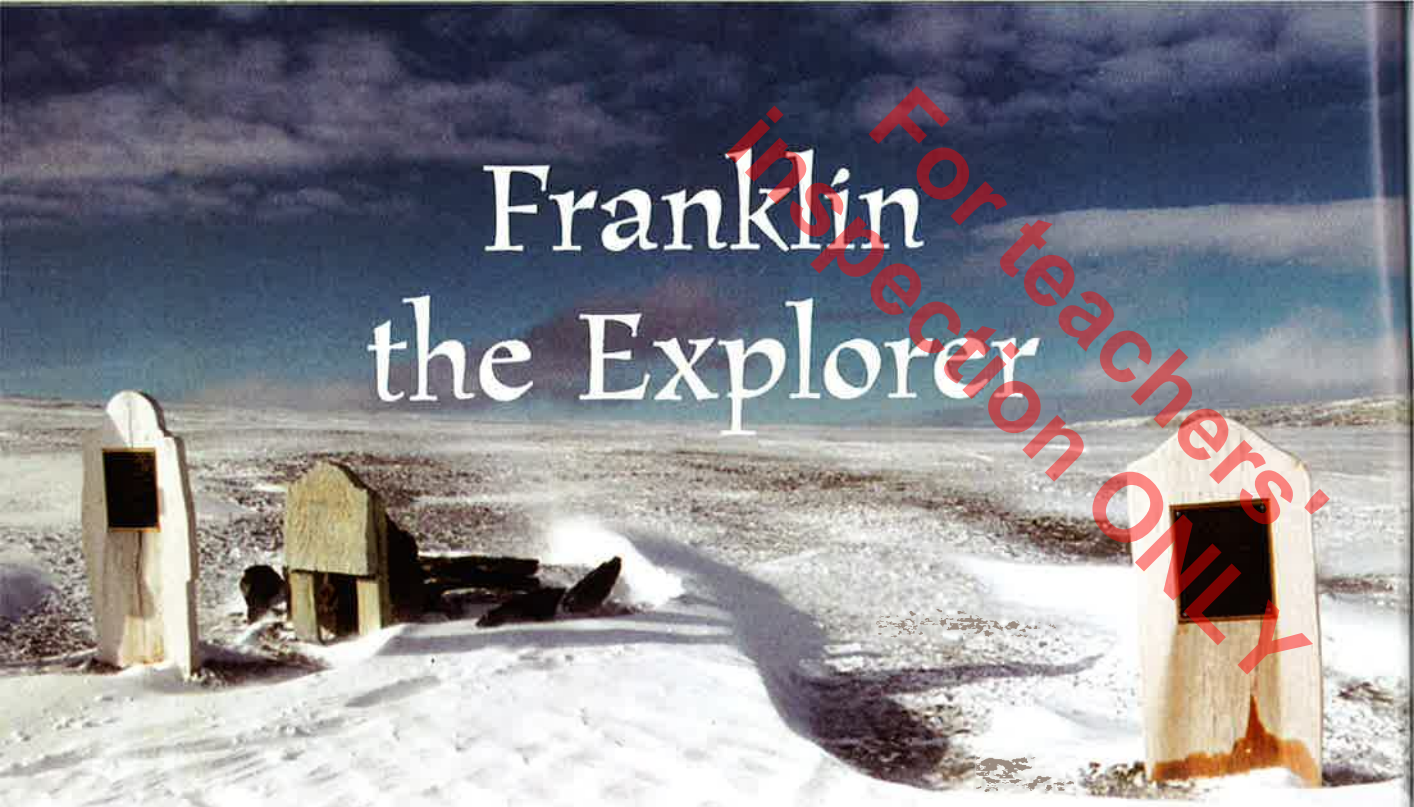
For teachers' inspection ONLY

If they could find the Northwest Passage, ships could sail in the opposite direction from the usual route – through the Arctic Circle and around Eastern Europe to Asia.



Franklin the Explorer

For teachers' inspection ONLY



The graves of the Arctic explorers.

It was August 1984. A group of researchers was standing on a freezing, icy plateau on the edge of the Arctic Circle. They were tired after digging through the rock-hard ice. Finally, they were about to reach what they were looking for – the bodies of some young English sailors who had died long ago.

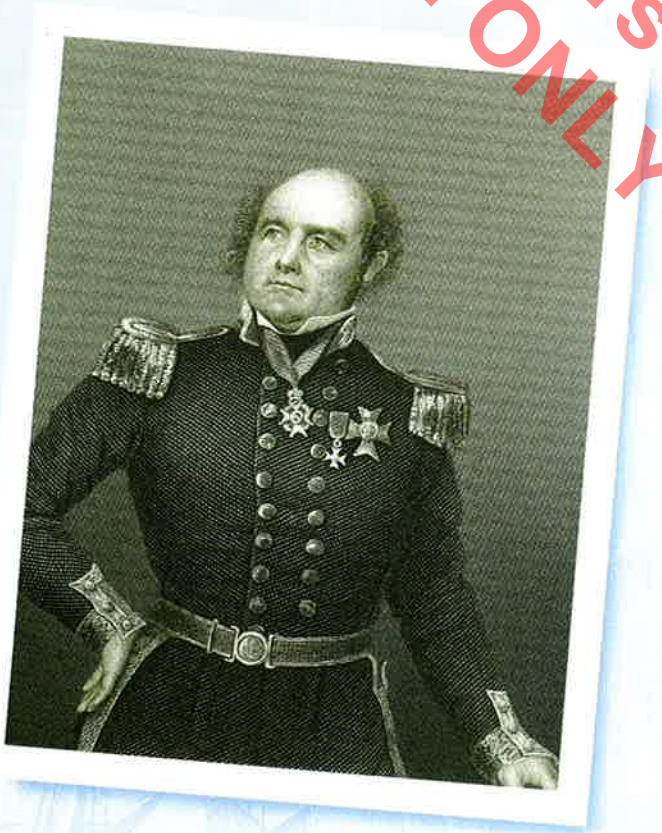
The researchers gasped as young John Torrington's face was finally revealed. He looked as if he had only just died. Yet he, and the other two young men carefully buried next to him, had been dead for more than 150 years. They had died in the cold, unforgiving Arctic that they had tried to explore. And their bodies had lain forgotten, preserved by Arctic ice, until modern scientists began to look again for the answers to an old mystery.

In 1845, John Torrington was part of the crew on the Franklin expedition, looking for a way through the dangerous icy seas above Canada. The ships and the men simply vanished. Why?

Could these silent bodies reveal the mystery of how they had died?

Back in the 1840s, Sir John Franklin knew the dangers of the Arctic: he had spent time exploring it as a young man, and had already escaped death there once. In 1821, he had travelled on a ship that had run out of food. Along with others, he had survived by eating shoe leather and slimy *lichen* scraped from rocks until he was rescued.

For teachers' inspection ONLY



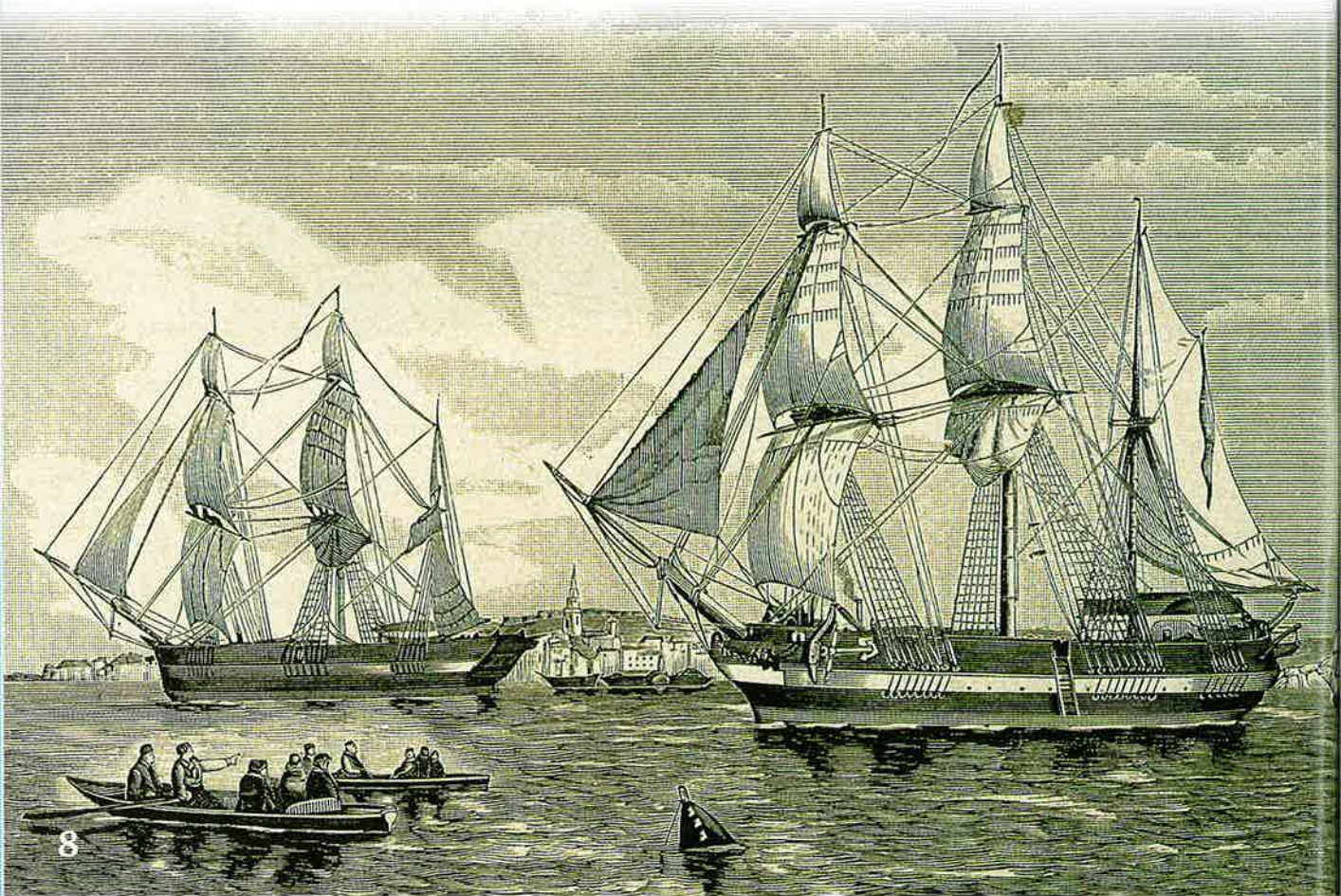
Sir John Franklin

But Franklin wanted to go back. He was sure that the Northwest Passage really did exist, and he was confident that he had the experience and the skills to find it.

Franklin was delighted when the British government chose him to lead the expedition, which left England in a blaze of publicity in May 1845.

The Franklin expedition was the best equipped Arctic expedition ever. The two ships which made up the expedition were called *Erebus* and *Terror*, and they used the latest technology available in the 1840s. The bows of the ships were plated with steel to resist the crushing ice, and each ship had a machine to change seawater to fresh water. Each ship also had an entire locomotive engine which would help move the ships through broken ice.

The two ships were well prepared to look after their crews during the long months that they would be surrounded by ice. There were luxuries for the men on board, including libraries of over a thousand books, and classes for crew who had not spent much time at school. There were theatrical costumes, an organ and a camera, which had just been invented. The men had wolf-skin blankets, and they were given 200 empty cylinders so that they could write messages and throw them overboard. Lady Franklin gave the officers a pet monkey, and the crew was given a dog called Jacko.



For teachers' inspection ONLY