

Book Launch 27th July 2010

You are invited to the launch of William Battersby's new book entitled 'James Fitzjames: the Mystery Man of the Franklin Expedition'. The event will entail a reception and a lecture. This will take place at Trinity House in the City of London on Tuesday 27th July from 6:00 pm until 9:30 pm with the lecture scheduled for 6:30 pm. The location of Trinity House is given at:

http://www.trinityhouse.co.uk/events_and_leisure/corporate_events/brief_tour/index.html.

That date, incidentally, marks the 197th anniversary of Fitzjames' birth.

Please email William Battersby at william@battersbyfamily.com if you wish to attend.

Further Information form William Battersby:

Why did I decide to research, write and publish the first ever biography of Captain James Fitzjames, RN, a man who was born in 1813 and whose date of death is unknown? It's because, in May 1845, Fitzjames sailed as Commander on HMS Erebus, Sir John Franklin's flagship on the Franklin Expedition, and quite literally was never seen again. The Franklin Expedition holds several unenviable records. It was an ambitious attempt to sail two ships, HMS Erebus and HMS Terror, through the North West Passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific north of the American continent. The ships departed with a combined complement of 129 men, all of whom died somewhere in the Arctic ice. The Expedition therefore holds the dubious distinction of being the biggest human disaster in British exploration history. After it became clear in 1848 that the Expedition was in difficulties, an unprecedented global rescue effort took place, led by the British but with much support from the US and other nations. First this was directed to finding survivors, then as the years passed to finding the records of the Expedition. Grisly evidence of disease, suffering and even cannibalism has been found, but even today there are few answers to the mystery of what happened to Franklin and his men. The effort to better understand the disaster continues to this day - 175 years after the Expedition sailed - making this by far the longest and most extensive search and rescue effort in history. If the lost ships are ever found, they will represent one of the world's greatest maritime treasures.

So the Franklin Expedition is an enduring mystery in British, Canadian and indeed global culture. But why Fitzjames? With my training as an archaeologist - my first degree subject - I was drawn to try my hand at researching into the mystery of the Franklin Expedition. I tried to collect hard data about the men who died on the Expedition from genealogical and other sources. I soon found that while Fitzjames was clearly a well-known figure, hard evidence on him was extra-ordinarily difficult to find. Apparently an establishment figure, he was tipped by contemporaries for great things and talked about as possibly to be the first man to reach the North Pole. In one of the recent histories of the Franklin Expedition he was described as

- *'well-educated, aristocratic, wealthy, of good family, Church of England, fast-rising in the service - and thumpingly, lispingly English to the core'* (Scott Cookman, Ice Blink).

I've found that that is far from the truth. In fact he was educated at home, flat broke nearly all his life and probably not originally baptised into the Church of England. In his own words, he was:

- *'thrown ... on the world by circumstances over which I have no control, without one friend in it ... through no fault of my own'*

So who was he, and how did he land such a 'plum job' as Commander on the Franklin Expedition? Well, the two secrets of who he was and the source of his influence I will reveal when the book is launched. And I hope you will agree with me that the book has succeeded in reconstructing the remarkable life of a charismatic young man cut off in his prime by a cruel catastrophe. During his 32 years of life before the Expedition, James Fitzjames had:

- Visited Babylon no less than three times
- Sailed an iron paddle steamer down the River Euphrates
- Dived into the Mersey fully clothed to rescue a drowning man
- Adjudicated in a fight between merchant seamen on a gigantic island of dung off the coast of Namibia.
- Mixed in the circles of some of the leading intellectuals of his day, including people like Thomas Carlyle and Julius Hare.
- Landed in the middle of the night in a camp of enemy soldiers, used his colloquial Arabic to harangue them to desert and had a price put on his head personally by the enemy General.
- Fought in the streets of China in the First Opium War - with rockets - and been severely injured.
- Sailed around the Persian Gulf on a Royal Navy sloop, complete with his pet cheetah.

As well as answering some so-far unanswered questions about the Franklin Expedition, I hope that you will enjoy the book and that it will do service to the memory of a decent man who died a tragic early death.

I look forward to meeting you.