

HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE

CARRICKFERGUS AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND DUNDALK HISTORICAL SOCIETY



ADMIRAL SIR FRANCIS LEOPOLD McCLINTOCK KCB FRS (1819-1897) Naval Officer and Arctic Explorer

Francis Leopold McClintock was born in Seatown, Dundalk, Co. Louth on 8 July 1819, son of Henry McClintock, a Customs Officer, and Elizabeth Melesina Fluery. His first appointment in the Royal Navy was as a first-class volunteer on 22 June 1831. He was stationed off South America until 1835. After serving in different parts of the world he studied at Portsmouth to qualify as lieutenant, getting his promotion in 1845.

His service became remarkable when, in February 1848, he was made second lieutenant on the *Enterprise*, in Sir James Clark Ross' expedition to the Arctic in search of Sir John Franklin missing expedition of 1845. Franklin had been attempting to find the North-West Passage. Between May and June of 1849, Ross and McClintock, the most successful of four sledging parties, found no trace of Franklin but mapped 150 nautical miles of the north coast of Somerset Island.

Based on his experience on the expedition McClintock devised a new system of sledging with men rather than dogs. His system revolutionised polar exploration by allowing seaborne expeditions to extend their range by hundreds of miles. In the four years after 1849 it enabled expeditions to discover vast areas of the Arctic Archipelago.

Between 1850 and 1859 McClintock took part in three more expeditions to find Franklin. During the first two, both unsuccessful; on the *Assistance*, commanded by Horatio Thomas Austin, and the *Intrepid*, commanded by Edward Belcher, McClintock travelled 1970 miles by sledge and surveyed 800 miles of previously undiscovered coastline.

In 1857 at Aberdeen McClintock took command of the *Fox* purchased by Lady Franklin, who had not accepted the Navy's decision to abandon the search. In April 1859, local Inuit told him that a ship had been crushed by ice off the coast of King William Island but the crew had apparently landed safely. The Inuit produced some artefacts which McClintock purchased. Subsequently they found two lifeboats containing human remains wearing European clothing, and two messages that showed conclusively that Franklin and his men had perished there. William Hobson, a member of McClintock's crew, found the only written record left by Franklin.

McClintock returned to England in September 1859 and received many honours, and was knighted in February 1860. His account of the *Fox* expedition was published as *The voyage of the "Fox" in the Arctic Seas: a narrative of the fate of Sir John Franklin and his companions* (London 1898)

On his last visit to the Arctic, July to November 1860, he commanded the *Bulldog* on a naval voyage to plot a route for a telegraph cable.

From 1860 until his retirement McClintock held many naval commands and shore appointments, including Commodore at Jamaica, Admiral-superintendent of Portsmouth Dockyard and Commander in Chief North America and West Indies Station. He was promoted Admiral on 7 July 1874, the day before he retired. He was made KCB in 1891.

Francis Leopold McClintock died on 17 November 1897. He was buried in Kensington cemetery. A memorial plaque was later unveiled in Westminster Abbey. Predictably, it described him as 'the discoverer of the Fate of Franklin'.

*Photos: Birthplace, Seatown, Dundalk; Admiral McClintock; arctic sledge
The sledge is one used by Admiral Mc Clintock on his expeditions. Photo by kind permission of John and Irene McClintock of "Redhall", Ballycarry, Co. Antrim.*

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