

SIR JOHN FRANKLIN'S EREBUS AND TERROR EXPEDITION – Gillian Hutchinson. Published in soft covers by Adlard Coles Nautical [www.adlardcoles.com] at £18.99. 176 245mm x 192mm pages, copiously illustrated in full colour throughout. ISBN 978-1-4729-4869-4. Also available for Kindle

The Arctic has always fascinated me, so when the opportunity came to review this book, I leapt at it. Our last unknown frontier... To read about the ghosts of our past added an extra frisson, especially as the main protagonist bears the same name as our previous Commodore.

The book itself is beautifully presented for a softback, printed on glossy paper and full of evocative imagery. Written by Gillian Hutchinson, Curator Emerita at the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich, it reads as though an expert is taking you from room to room of an exhibition on the subject, filling in the history as you go. As such, it serves both as a wonderful introduction or highly informative follow-up to the first major exhibition about the attempts to find the North West Passage since the discovery of Sir John Franklin's two expedition ships – HMS Erebus and HMS Terror – an exhibition that is due to run until 5th January 2018 and that I for one certainly will not miss.

The author carefully sets the scene prior to the ill-fated expedition of 1845, outlining previous attempts made to find a northern route through to the Pacific and the reasons for its trade and naval importance. The cartographic use of globes from that time is atmospheric and the reproduction of portraits of the various protagonists brings to life the explorers of the day. The inclusion of paintings inspired by the various expeditions adds to the richness of the book as a cultural publication as well as an historic review.

Sir John Franklin's Erebus and Terror Expedition is devoted to the men and ships that took part in the expedition. A short biography of Sir John illustrated with personal objects, and a detailed description of the two ships he was to command, is followed by an account of the officers and crew. Reproductions of early daguerreotype photographs of the officers – commissioned by Sir John Franklin's wife Jane – provide a haunting aspect to the book as we gaze at the men who were all lost. This section is also enhanced by the personal stories that Hutchinson has pieced together from the archives.

The expedition was expected to last at least two summers up in the frozen wastes, although they provisioned for three years. Hutchinson draws on reports from previous expeditions, and letters and reports sent home from Greenland and further west, to describe in vivid detail how the men spent their time, and uses photographs of everyday artefacts and artistic renditions of typical scenes to bring the experience to life.

The second half of the book covers the numerous searches that were undertaken to discover the fate of the expedition over the next 40 years. Lady Franklin herself sponsored seven expeditions, and eventually more ships and men were lost looking for Franklin than were lost in the expedition itself. (Her actions inspired many authors to

examine her role, and her efforts to find out what had happened to her husband prompted the composition of Lady Franklin's Lament, a ballad which has been recorded by over 40 artists including Bob Dylan. Reading about her tenacity has certainly inspired me to find out more about her.

Whilst traces of the expedition were found, and various theories about what had happened were reported in the journals of the time, it was not until 2014 that HMS Erebus was finally located and a team of Parks Canada archaeology divers were able to work on the wreck, bringing up some of the many artefacts that Hutchinson has used to illustrate her work. HMS Terror was found the following year, and the final chapter describes their findings and conclusions.

This book is a great read and will undoubtedly prompt a desire to know more, and the bibliography suggests how to go about this. Finding out about our maritime adventurers is always inspiring – such extraordinary stamina and bravery in the face of the unknown. But it is also fascinating to find a little nugget of information that brings a connection with today's world: who would have thought that Sir John Franklin, whilst he was governor in Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania) prior to returning to the UK in 1844, would have sailed to Melbourne in a schooner called Flying Fish!

APC