



## HISTORY MATTERS

# SIR JOHN FRANKLIN OF SPILSBY

### ON THE TRAIL OF AN ARCTIC EXPLORER

Sir John Franklin is famous for his expeditions to the Arctic, but most famous for the mystery surrounding the disappearance of himself, his ships and crew while on his final expedition to seek the North West Passage, in 1845.

He was born in Spilsby, so join us on a trail through the town and learn about his voyages, his governorship of Tasmania and the rescue expeditions to discover his ultimate fate.



Birthplace plaque

1

## JOHN FRANKLIN

### 1786 – 1798 EARLY YEARS

John was born on 16th April 1786 in Spilsby. His father, Willingham, came from Sibsey, and his mother, Hannah, from Algarkirk near Boston. John was the 9th of 12 children, although Henry, born the year before John, lived for less than a month. Three sisters were born after John. The daughter of the eldest of these later married Alfred, Lord Tennyson. Through the son of John's elder brother Willingham, he was also related to the Revd Canon Rawnsley, co-founder of the National Trust.

However, John's birthplace was a humble dwelling, which can still be seen today. His father was a mercer, although the family home at 25 High Street has for many years been a bakery. John's birth is celebrated with a plaque on the wall of the adjoining alleyway.

John was baptised on 18th April 1786 in St James Church, Spilsby. He was probably sent away to school in St Ives in Huntingdonshire, but from the age of 10 he was educated at Louth Grammar School. On a trip to Saltfleetby on the coast, aged 12, he became enthralled by the sea and announced his intention of making it his career. His father opposed this idea and, hoping to put him off, allowed him to take a trial voyage on a small merchant ship trading between Hull and Lisbon. John loved it.



2

## EARLY DAYS IN THE NAVY

The Royal Navy was seen as a more respectable prospect and so, at the age of 14, John's father secured him an appointment as a 'first class volunteer' on HMS Polyphemus.



In 1801 she sailed from the Baltic and took part in the first Battle of Copenhagen, at which Admiral Nelson famously stated "I see no signal", and at which the Danes were defeated. Later that year, John joined Captain Matthew Flinders on a voyage to survey the South West coast of Australia on HMS Investigator. Flinders, born in Donington, was John's cousin-by-marriage, as his widowed father had later married Elizabeth Weekes, who was the sister of John's mother Hannah. Disaster struck the expedition when Investigator was found to be unseaworthy, and the crew transferred to HMS Porpoise. This ship was then wrecked on a reef and Franklin was abandoned on a sandbank before ultimately being rescued. The rescue ship sailed to China where he gained passage on the Earl Camden under Commodore Nathaniel Dance, taking part en route in the Battle of Pulo Auro. John arrived back in the UK in 1804 and in September he joined the crew of HMS Bellerophon, and took part in the Battle of Trafalgar. According to his senior officer, John Franklin "performed his duties as signal midshipman with very conspicuous zeal and ability". As a result of the bombardments however,

3

John suffered lifelong deafness. From 1807 to 1815 Franklin continued to serve in the Royal Navy, as Master's Mate on board HMS Bedford, taking part in the Battle of New Orleans, where he was wounded in the shoulder and mentioned in dispatches.



St James, Spilsby

## DECLINE IN FAMILY FORTUNES

Although John had been appointed 1st Lieutenant of HMS Forth in 1815, the ship's company was disbanded in September and John found himself "on the beach" on half-pay. His eldest brother Thomas had become involved in a speculative business venture and had lost both his and his father's money, and had committed suicide in 1807. John was able to contribute a small amount to the family coffers, and had bought Southfield Farm in Mavis Enderby (5 miles from Spilsby) for his parents to live in. His mother had died in 1810. John, however, was determined to return to sea, and in 1818 he sailed to the Arctic as second in command of HMS Trent. Pack ice forced their return and John had to consider alternatives.

4

## THE CALL OF THE ARCTIC

It had long been held that the North West Passage across the top of Canada would be a shortcut from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. However, by the early 1800s it was clear that this was not a viable trading route, but Arctic exploration was still a British obsession, and nine Royal Navy expeditions were organized by Sir John Barrow, 2nd Secretary to the Admiralty.



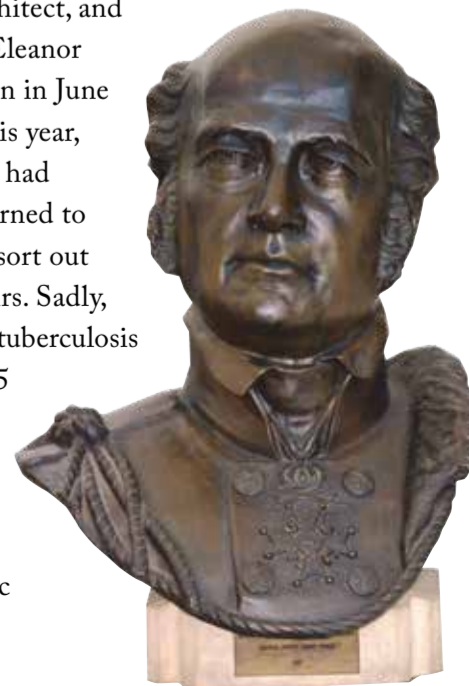
© National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London

5

## THE MAN WHO ATE HIS BOOTS

In May 1819 John Franklin undertook an overland expedition from Hudson Bay to map the North coast of Canada. The expedition was a disaster. With all their supplies used up, the men resorted to eating lichen, chewing old bones and even the leather from their boots or belts. 11 of the 20 men in Franklin's party perished, mostly from starvation, but those that survived returned to the UK in 1822 to great acclaim. Franklin, feted as 'The Man Who Ate His Boots', wrote his bestselling book "Narrative of a Journey to the Shores of the Polar Sea", and was in great demand as a speaker and at social gatherings.

In August 1823 he married Eleanor Porden, daughter of a London architect, and their daughter, Eleanor Isabella, was born in June 1824. During this year, Franklin's father had died and he returned to Lincolnshire to sort out the family's affairs. Sadly, his wife died of tuberculosis in February 1825 aged just 29, only a week after Franklin had set off on his second Arctic expedition.



6

10

Interest in Franklin's last expedition was rekindled in September 2014 when Parks Canada announced that the wreck of HMS Erebus had been discovered near O'Reilly Island, in 11 metres of sea. Two years later the wreck of HMS Terror was also located by the Arctic Research Foundation, coincidentally in Terror Bay, south of King William Island, in 48 metres of water, with masts standing and hatches closed. Both wrecks are now designated as National Historic Sites of Canada. Relics brought up from the ships, including the ship's bell from HMS Erebus, dated 1845, together with relics found on the rescue missions, were displayed in an exhibition entitled "Death In the Ice" at the Canadian Maritime Museum in Greenwich, and at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, and at the exploration of the wrecks is ongoing – who knows what clues may be uncovered as to the fate of Franklin's last expedition?

## DISCOVERY

Lady Jane Franklin, meanwhile, was not satisfied with the efforts being made, and launched further expeditions at her own cost. The most successful was the steam yacht "Fox" under Captain Leopold McClintock and Lieutenant William Hobson. They sailed to Beechey Island and King William Island, where a cairn was found at Victory Point. Inside, written on an Admiralty form, was the message "Sir John Franklin died on 11th June 1847", countersigned by Crozier and Fitzjames. Neither Franklin's grave nor his body has ever been found.

9

And Captain Francis Crozier on HMS Terror were equipped with new steam engines, screw propellers and furnace heating. With 134 men on board and provisions for three years, they set off from Greenhithe in May 1845. In late July they were sighted by whaling ships in Baffin Bay but by September 1846 they were stuck fast in ice near King William Island. What happened next is a matter of informed speculation, but it is believed that after two years in 1848 the first of many search expeditions set out but it was not until 1850 that the graves of three crew members were found at Beechey Island. An investigation as to their fate suggested that they had died of tuberculosis, pneumonia and possibly lead poisoning due to badly sealed canned goods. In 1854, relics, including Franklin's Guephic medal, were brought back and oral history from the Inuit people told of the starvation and mass grave of the crews. At this point the Admiralty declared all members of the expedition to be dead and removed them from the active list. Prior to this, in October 1852, Franklin had been promoted to Rear-Admiral of the Blue.



Following John's dismissal of his Colonial Secretary, Franklin himself was removed from office and ordered back to England in 1843.

8

Although Franklin was by now 59, he was invited to lead a further Arctic expedition to finish the surveying of the North West Passage. Serving under him were Captain James Fitzjames on HMS Erebus, and Lieutenant-Governorship of Van Dieman's Land (renamed as Tasmania in 1855), which he accepted. Prior to leaving England he embarked on a tour of Lincolnshire, and the town of Spilsby presented him with a piece of silver plate. Sir John Franklin and his daughter Eleanor and two of his nieces. His tenure in Tasmania had long-lasting influences. He and Jane were instrumental in improving the convict circumstances, setting up an education system, founding the Tasmanian Natural History Society and establishing the Anniversary Regatta. Unfortunately, John's position was a difficult one, with conflicting influences from Government offices back in the UK, and locally.



## LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR OF VAN DIEMAN'S LAND

1845: THE FINAL EXPEDITION

Although Franklin was by now 59, he was invited to lead a further Arctic expedition to finish the surveying of the North West Passage. Serving under him were Captain James Fitzjames on HMS Erebus, and Lieutenant-Governorship of Van Dieman's Land (renamed as Tasmania in 1855), which he accepted. Prior to leaving England he embarked on a tour of Lincolnshire, and the town of Spilsby presented him with a piece of silver plate. Sir John Franklin and his daughter Eleanor and two of his nieces. His tenure in Tasmania had long-lasting influences. He and Jane were instrumental in improving the convict circumstances, setting up an education system, founding the Tasmanian Natural History Society and establishing the Anniversary Regatta. Unfortunately, John's position was a difficult one, with conflicting influences from Government offices back in the UK, and locally.

7

Franklin's second trip was better planned, with supplies shipped in previously, with lightweight boats. Franklin succeeded in navigating down the Mackenzie River to the sea in one season, and mapped 1,200 miles of coastline. On the expedition's return to the UK in September 1827 they were welcomed as heroes, Franklin was awarded the Paris Geographical Society's gold medal and in 1829 he was knighted by King George IV. He wrote up and published his "Narrative of a Second Expedition to the Shores of the Polar Sea" and he also remarried. Jane Griffin had been a close friend of Eleanor Porden, and like her, was an accomplished woman with a wide range of interests. On 5th November 1828 John and Jane were married at Stanmore in Middlesex. In August 1830 he accepted command of HMS Rainbow, a naval frigate, which proceeded to the Mediterranean to assist in peace-keeping between the newly independent Greece and its former master, Turkey. Franklin was again knighted, this time by the King of Greece, as a Knight Commander of the Guephic Order of Honor. John and his wife then spent time travelling in the Mediterranean and North Africa, returning to England in 1834.



© National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London



Produced by East Lindsey District Council © 2018  
Designed by: Print & Design, Compass Point Business Services 2018

Acknowledgements  
Compiled by Stephanie Round, Spilsby and Hundley Walkers are Welcome  
Photographs by kind permission of Mick Holmes, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.  
Dean and Chapter of Westminster.



Love Lincolnshire Wolds  
@LoveLincolnshireWolds  
LoveLincolnshireWolds

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION  
ON THE AREA, VISIT -  
loveincolnshirewolds.com

# THE FRANKLIN TRAIL

Follow this trail to find out what Spilsby may have been like when Sir John Franklin was born here in 1786, and the town's current associations with him.

**1** Start at the Franklin Hall. Built in 1899 as a Drill Hall and rifle range, it now serves as the town's main meeting place and houses the Town Council Chamber. If the Hall is open, go inside to discover an important bust of Sir John Franklin, and a tapestry depicting his life, created by Spilsby WI. There are also toilets and information leaflets. Opposite the Hall is the entrance to Bull Yard, in Georgian times a very poor part of town, and by 1851 housing 162 people in 31 cottages.

**2** Walk along Halton Road, passing Alma Place, erected on the site of the Alma Engineering Works, and turn right down Tasman Road, named after Abel Tasman, the Dutch seafarer and explorer who in 1642 was the first European to reach the island off Australia. He named it Van Dieman's Land after the Governor-General of the Dutch East India Company, with its name changing to Tasmania in 1855. Sir John Franklin was Lieutenant-Governor of Tasmania from 1836 until 1843, accompanied by his second wife, Jane. Together they made considerable improvements to the cultural and educational lives of both free settlers and convicts, although his actions were not always appreciated.

**3** As Tasman Road bears to the right, look left to see Erebus Close, named for HMS Erebus, the ship that Franklin commanded on his final voyage to find the North-West Passage. The ship and crew were last heard of in 1847, but in September 2014 Erebus was discovered in Canadian Arctic waters, 11 metres deep. Some artefacts, including the ship's bell, have now been recovered from the wreck. Further along Tasman Road you will pass Resolute Close, named after one of the ships in the Admiralty expedition mounted in 1852 to search for Franklin's whereabouts. It is probably preferable that the name of *this* ship was chosen for the street rather than that of Franklin's other expedition ship, HMS Terror!

**4** On your right is Franklin Gardens, a modern eco-development with its eye-catching jagged roofscape, built in 2004. Continue through the barrier and bear right. You will pass Fitzjames Close which is named after Captain James Fitzjames, second in command of HMS Erebus. Take the alleyway next to number 11 Shamfields, leading uphill, and turn left at the top to explore more of the town.

**5** The house to the left of the Red Lion public house was built around 1700 as one of the first brick-built houses in the town. 'Little Italy' hides a mud and stud construction, typical of the poorer houses in the eighteenth century, and further along Market Street there are impressive houses on The Terrace. At The George public house, carefully cross Boston Road to reach St James Church.

**6** Enter the church, the original part of which was built in the 14th century, with the tower added in 1529. This is how it would have looked when Franklin was baptised here in 1786. It was restored and enlarged in 1879 with the addition of the south aisle and the west end. On the wall at the west end there is a monumental tablet to Sir John Franklin, erected by his second wife,



*Did you know that among the items taken on the final expedition were a monkey called Jacko, a library and a press for printing on-board newspapers!*

*Did you know that Erebus in Greek mythology was the entrance to Hades, or the place of the dead?*

Lady Jane Franklin, after whom a modern estate in the town is named. There is also a monument to Eleanor, his first wife, and two of his brothers: Willingham and James. The flag on the wall was presented to this church on the bicentenary of Franklin's birth by the High Commissioner of Canada.

**7** Leave the church and cross over to the old Grammar School, founded in 1550 by King Edward VI. Franklin himself went to the Grammar School at Louth, but the former secondary modern school in Spilsby, which opened in 1953, bore his name. Go left to admire the impressive Spilsby Theatre, designed by H J Kendall in the Greek style. It opened in 1826, and originally housed the Court House for the Lindsey Quarter Sessions, with a prison behind, since demolished.

**8** Go back past the school and cross Ashby Road to arrive at the west end of the market place. The arched building ahead served in Franklin's time as a Corn Exchange. The statue of Sir John Franklin, was erected in 1861, with £750 being raised by public subscription. The unveiling was marked by

the distribution of buns, loose tea and pints of ale to the townsfolk. Franklin died in Arctic Canada on 11th June 1847, although his body has never been found.

**9** Now go left to the White Hart Hotel, on the front of which you will find one of the earliest post boxes in the country. In Franklin's time, mail coaches would have stopped here 3 or more times a week, putting Spilsby in touch with the outside world, and probably taking the young Franklin to London to join the Royal Navy, where he served with Admiral Nelson at the Battles of Copenhagen and Trafalgar.

**10** Further along High Street is Franklin Passage, once known as Jennings' Smoot. This passageway runs alongside the house (now a bakery) once owned by John's father, Willingham Franklin, in which John Franklin was born on 16th April 1786. As one of at least 11 children it must have been quite a squash!

**11** Cross to the far side of the central market place, turn right and read the information board detailing the life and exploits of Sir John Franklin and his Arctic expeditions. HMS Terror was finally located in September 2016, co-incidentally in Terror Bay, standing in 48 metres of Arctic water, with 3 masts

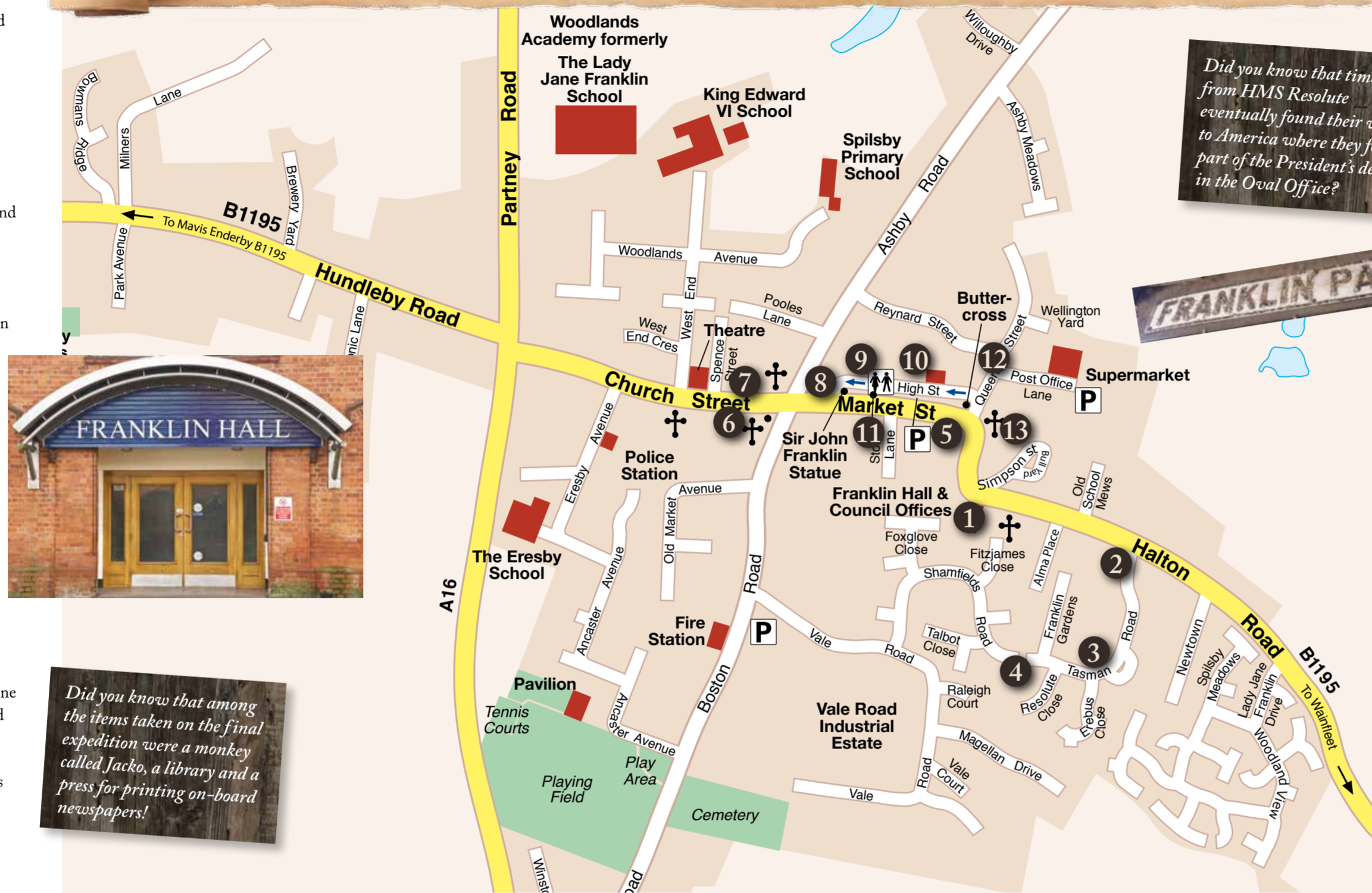
standing and all hatches closed. What happened to the crew, and that of HMS Erebus, has long been a mystery.

**12** In the furthest market square you will find the medieval Butter Cross, beside which stood the town stocks. The little white house beyond it is made of mud and stud, although it would originally have been thatched with reed. Queen Street was originally called Leather Lane, indicative of the local trade. Spilsby at the time of Franklin's birth had a population of around 900, but was a market town of some importance with a weekly market and twice yearly fairs.

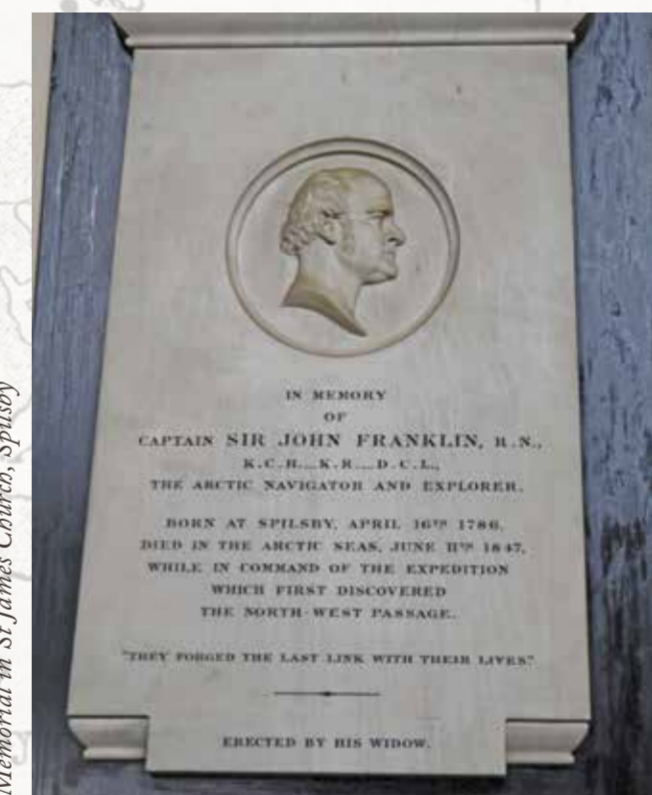
**13** Cross to admire the Methodist Church, built in 1878, on the site of the White Horse Inn where carriers' wagons would stop for refreshment. Carefully cross Halton Road at the crossing to arrive back at the Franklin Hall. There are plenty of outlets in town for your own refreshment!

*Did you know that Sir John Franklin was effectively only third choice to lead the final expedition? It was said that "If you don't let him go, the man will die of disappointment".*

# HISTORY MATTERS ON THE TRAIL OF SIR JOHN FRANKLIN



*Did you know that timbers from HMS Resolute eventually found their way to America where they form part of the President's desk in the Oval Office?*



# MEMORIALS TO FRANKLIN

Sir John Franklin is commemorated all over the world with geographical features, statues and memorials, as well as streets and schools. In the west Market Place in Spilsby, is the statue unveiled in 1861 and paid for by public subscription. A matching statue can be found in Hobart, Tasmania. Inside St James Church in Spilsby you can find a wall tablet erected by his widow, and the flag presented by the High Commissioner of Canada on the bicentenary of Franklin's birth.

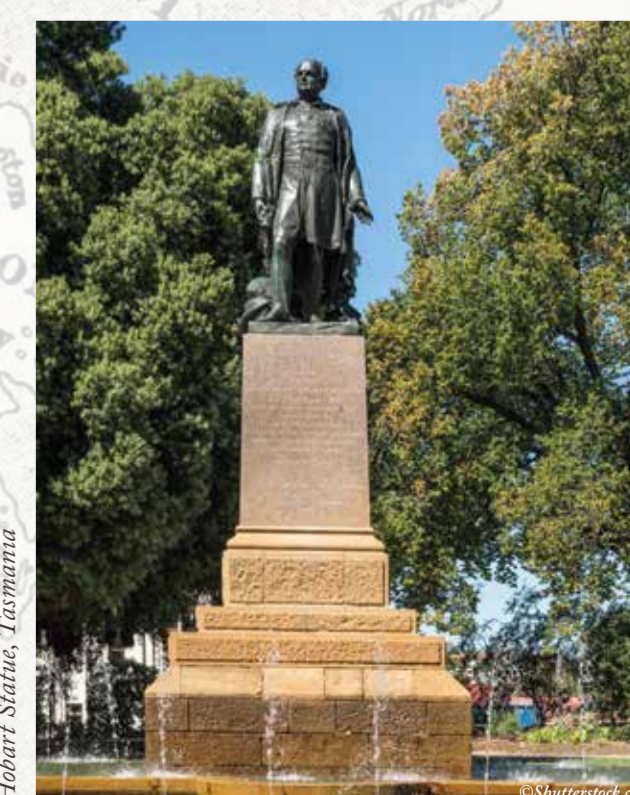
A significant memorial stands at the entrance to the Royal Naval College Chapel in Greenwich, London, commemorating the whole crew of the final expedition, under which is buried the body of one of the crewmen, possibly Dr Harry Goodsir, acting surgeon on HMS Erebus.

In the chapel of St John the Evangelist at Westminster Abbey a marble monument to Franklin was erected by his wife and unveiled by Admiral Sir George Back in July 1875. He had accompanied Franklin on his two overland expeditions, and acted as advisor to the search missions. This has the epitaph written by Alfred, Lord Tennyson:

*"Not here; the white north has thy bones; and thou, heroic sailor-soul, art passing on thine happier voyage now toward no earthly pole."*

Prior to this, in 1860, Parliament granted £2,000 for a statue in Waterloo Place, London, unveiled in 1866. The citation reads: "To The Great Arctic Navigator And His Brave Companions Who Sacrificed Their Lives In Completing The Discovery Of The North-West Passage AD 1847-8."

There is also a memorial in the former St Paul's Church, Dock Street in London, built as a Seamen's church in 1846-7. Closer to home, there is a commemorative window in Lincoln Cathedral.



Spilsby Market Place

Memorial in St. James Church, Spilsby

Westminster Abbey Memorial © Dean and Chapter of Westminster

Royal Naval College Chapel

Waterloo Place Statue

Hobart Statue, Tasmania