

Edward Augustus Inglefield (1820-1894)

Inglefield was one of the large number of Royal Naval officers whose careers were advanced by participation in the Franklin search. This was a highly satisfactory time for such men as it provided ample opportunity for employment in a rigorous environment and in a cause in which there was a gratifyingly high level of public interest. The North was certainly much healthier than the other contemporary area in which naval initiative could be displayed — off the African coast in the suppression of the slave trade. In the Franklin search Inglefield did not, however, achieve the highest distinction. He visited the Arctic three times, but his second and third voyages were simply means of communication with Sir Edward Belcher's 1852-1854 expedition. His first voyage, on the other hand, did have one solid achievement that greatly redounded to Inglefield's credit, and this is sufficient reason for devoting attention to him.

Born into a naval family and educated at the Royal Naval College in Portsmouth, he entered the service in 1832 and immediately saw action in the eastern Mediterranean in operations off the Lebanese coast, where the situation seems to have been as confused as it is today. Inglefield then served in H.M.S. *Samarang*, engaged in surveying various coasts of the Pacific Ocean, and he was on board that vessel when she sank. After further service in Latin American waters, he was promoted commander on 18 November 1845.

When the Franklin search got under way, Inglefield, frustrated in his efforts to obtain a naval appointment, volunteered his services to Lady Franklin. He was, in 1852, appointed to the command of *Isabel*, a small vessel of 149 tons that had an auxiliary steam engine. Inglefield was one of Lady Franklin's

happier appointments. The expedition differed from the other expeditions in which she was active in that Inglefield was, himself, to "provide a crew, and what other fitments the vessel needed" for the voyage, on return from which the ship was to become his own property.

The voyage, which lasted from 10 July to 4 November 1852, was uneventful. Inglefield had chosen a good, competent crew, and in this respect an interesting comparison is afforded with the *Prince Albert* expedition of 1850 in which the commander, C.C. Forsyth, had no hand in personnel selection and had great difficulties with his men. The plan was to search Jones Sound and the west coast of Baffin Bay for traces of Franklin. The west coast of Greenland was examined on the outward voyage, and new discoveries of geographical features were made. Smith Sound was penetrated to a latitude of 78°28'21"N, "therefore placing the *Isabel* about 140 miles further than had been reached by any previous navigator, of whom we have any records." Inglefield was determined to land in order to erect a notice "that the British Flag had been first carried into this unknown sea," and, indeed, he believed that he had entered the open polar basin so much sought by previous mariners. Worsening weather prevented him from landing, and following a narrow escape from the lee pack, he headed southward. Jones Sound was investigated as far as 84°10'W, and then a visit was made to Beechey Island in Lancaster Sound, where communication was established with H.M.S. *North Star*, the depot ship of Belcher's expedition. Inglefield "pressed upon Captain Pullen the acceptance of all my surplus stores and provisions," but this offer was declined as Pullen was "prohibited by his commanding officer



"Dangerous position of the *Isabel* caught in the lee pack." From Inglefield's *A Summer Search for Sir John Franklin*.

from in any way to interfere with a private vessel." Despite this, Inglefield made various presents to the officers' mess, including "preserved beef and ox cheek," and after exchanging letters, *Isabel* set sail. The eastern coast of Baffin Island was then examined, before the approach of winter forced the expedition home.

Inglefield's book *A Summer Search for Sir John Franklin; with a Peep into the Polar Basin*, published in 1853, is one of the more interesting of the genre. Inglefield's account itself only covers 128 pages. The remainder of the short volume comprises observations on the natural history of the area visited, notably 48 turgid pages on the physical geography by Dr. P.C. Sutherland, surgeon to the expedition. The portion by Inglefield is clearly written and provides a matter-of-fact account of the expedition's activities. He felt, however, the need to instruct as well as to inform his readers, especially about such arcane matters as the details of *Isabel's* steam machinery. One wonders quite how much, if anything, was made of such passages in Victorian drawing rooms. The illustrations, which were by Inglefield, are more competently executed than are those of some contemporary works.

Inglefield was well received at home and was awarded honours and medals. In the following year, the Admiralty appointed him to command a voyage by H.M.S. *Phoenix* and *Breadalbane* to take supplies to Belcher's expedition. Also participating in the voyage was Joseph René Bellot, the French officer who had obtained fame during the *Prince Albert* expedition of 1851-1852. From the tone of the instructions issued to Inglefield, one gets the impression that the Admiralty was tiring of the Franklin search, particularly of its cost. Inglefield was told in no uncertain terms that the voyage had a transport function only. His "most essential duty" was to clear the stores, after which he was, "without a moment's delay," to return. His "most especial duty" was to carry out these orders, and "it is our most positive direction that you are on no account whatever" to run the risk of the ships' being detained. The vessels arrived at Beechey Island on 8 August 1853, and Inglefield was immediately made aware of the difficult situation on the Belcher expedition arising from the character of its commander. He received orders from Belcher, his superior officer, that directly contradicted those he had had from the Admiralty. After consulting Captain Pullen of *North Star*, he prudently decided to comply with the latter. Two unfortunate incidents occurred during this voyage: *Breadalbane* was lost off Cape Riley on 21 August, and Bellot, while carrying despatches up Wellington Channel, was drowned.

Inglefield returned to England with the news that the crew of H.M.S. *Investigator*, which had attempted to penetrate the Canadian archipelago from the west, was safe and that the Northwest Passage had finally been discovered. He transported home Samuel Gurney Cresswell, of the *Investigator*, and Cresswell thus became the first person to travel through the Passage from end to end.

Despite the loss of *Breadalbane*, Inglefield received the plaudits of the Admiralty and was appointed to conduct a similar voyage the following year. This time his instructions were much



From National Portrait Gallery, London.

less peremptory: "You are now so well acquainted with the navigation of those seas, and have so successfully performed your previous service, that we do not consider it necessary to bind you with any specific directions." Upon arrival at Beechey Island, Inglefield discovered that all four of Belcher's ships and *Investigator* had been abandoned and that their crews were assembled on board *North Star*, the only remaining vessel. Most of the men were transported home in Inglefield's ships.

This ended Inglefield's arctic service. He participated in the Crimean War and was present at the fall of Sebastopol and the blockade of Odessa. His later career was one of great success. He held such varied appointments as naval attaché, Washington, and as admiral superintendent of the Malta dockyard. One of his main interests was the mechanical development of the Navy. He invented a new anchor and hydraulic steering apparatus and published several technical works. He retired in March 1885 in enjoyment of a flag officer's good service pension and died in September 1894.

FURTHER READINGS

INGLEFIELD, EDWARD AUGUSTUS. 1853. *A Summer Search for Sir John Franklin; with a Peep into the Polar Basin*. London: Thomas Harrison.

Ian R. Stone
The Registry
University of Kent at Canterbury
England