

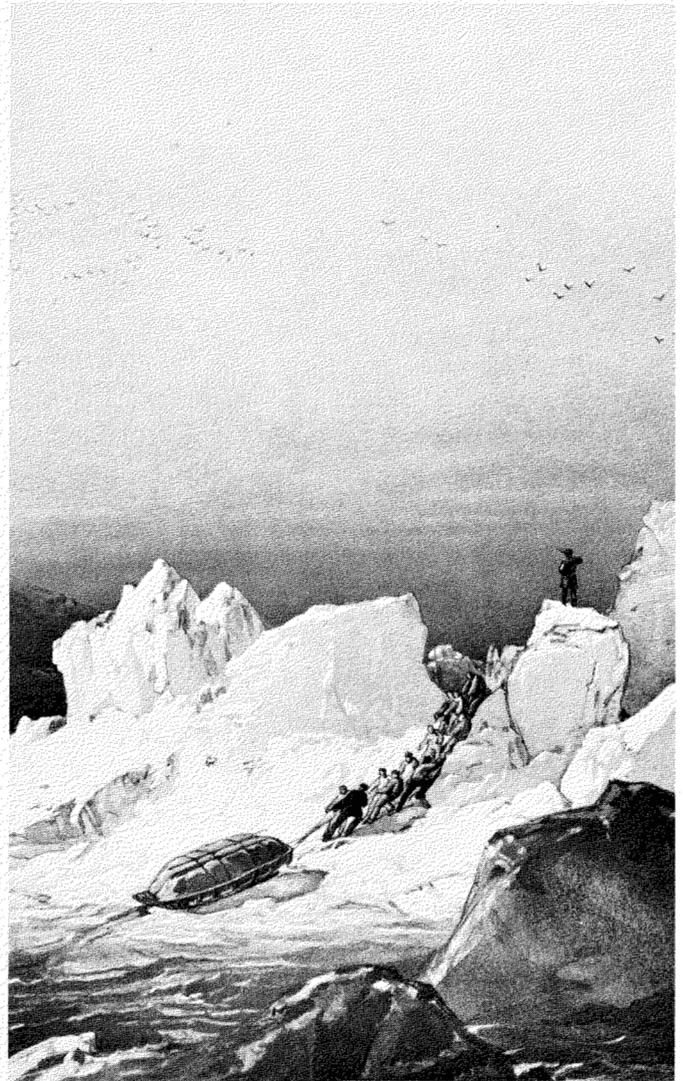
Samuel Gurney Cresswell (1827-1867)

The family of S.G. Cresswell lived in or near Lynn, Norfolk, England, enjoying connections with the well-known Quaker family of the Gurneys and an acquaintance with William Edward Parry, the arctic explorer. Samuel Cresswell was born in 1827, joined the Navy in 1842, and served in the China seas, where he was twice gazetted for service against the pirates of Borneo. On his return to England he was — perhaps through Parry's influence — appointed to the 1848-49 Franklin rescue expedition led by Sir James Ross. On Ross's return from his fruitless mission, his ships were re-fitted to make the voyage to the western Arctic by way of Cape Horn and Bering Strait. Captain Collinson took command on the *Enterprise*; Cresswell became second lieutenant on the *Investigator* under Commander Robert McClure. Unaccompanied, the latter ship passed through Bering Strait and coasted along the American north shore. Cresswell commanded the whaleboat in which the ship's surgeon Armstrong and the Eskimo interpreter J.A. Miertsching studied the "smoking cliffs" of Franklin Bay. In late autumn McClure discovered Prince of Wales Strait and won for officer and crew the honour of completing the Northwest Passage. They wintered in the frozen strait.

In April 1851, McClure sent out travelling sledge parties to search for traces of Franklin. In discharge of his duty, Cresswell explored 170 miles of the east and northeast Banks Island shore, at which time some of his crew were disabled by frostbite. A second excursion took him to the south end of the strait.

In the summer the ship rounded Banks Island by its west shore, a voyage of frightful peril, and her throes in the gale-driven pack have been illustrated by Cresswell in a well-known painting. She took refuge in Mercy Bay on the northeast shore of Banks Island and was permanently locked in the ice from 25 September 1851 until the spring of 1853, her crew being reduced to the verge of starvation.

What would probably have turned out to have been a suicidal dash on foot for the continent was averted on 7 April 1853 by the arrival of Lieutenant Bedford Pim, with a dog team, bearing the intelligence that two ships under Captain Kellett were berthed at the small Dealy Island off the shore of Melville Island. McClure would not consent to the immediate desertion of his imprisoned ship, but he put Cresswell and Miertsching in charge of a sledge party to conduct six helpless invalids 160 miles over shattered ice-fields to the comfort and security of the rescue vessels. Cresswell carried out this trying and laborious duty with efficiency and no loss of life. Kellett soon despatched Cresswell with more of the sick farther east to Beechey Island; when the ice broke up, he boarded the supply vessel for home. On his arrival in late autumn, Cresswell enjoyed a temporary celebrity as bearer of the news that the long-sought Northwest Passage had been discovered, and he was feted by the townspeople of King's Lynn.



"Sledging Over Hummocky Ice, April, 1853"
by S.G. Cresswell

In 1854 Cresswell served at the rank of commander with the Baltic fleet in the war against Russia. Three years later he sailed to China with a detachment of gunboats, served in the Chinese war on the Peiho River, and then went on a cruise against pirates. According to the unofficial testimony of his hometown newspaper, he took or destroyed 26 junks. He was promoted to full captain in September 1859, but after some years of unemployment, Cresswell was obliged to decline an appointment owing to ill health caused by "fatigue and starvation" — doubtless the deferred effect of many months of toil and hunger in the Arctic. He did not long survive: his funeral is reported in the *Lynn Advertiser* as taking place on 22 August 1867.

Despite his record of service, Cresswell seems to have been an officer of not more than routine competence. The diarists of the *Investigator*, Armstrong and Miertsching, do



"Critical Position of H.M.S. Investigator on the North coast of Baring Island", by S.G. Cresswell

not name him as one of the hunters of caribou and hare whose exertions staved off complete catastrophe at Mercy Bay — in fact, they barely mention him at all. He is best remembered as the artist of the cruise. His paintings of the ship in the grip of the ice and almost flung over on her side, and of his Dealy Island party, painfully dragging a loaded sledge up a ramp of ice-rubble, do more than the liveliest prose to bring home to us what was endured by the stalwarts of the British Navy in the mapping of Canada's northern archipelago with wind-jammers and man-hauled sledges.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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FURTHER READINGS

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