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## New Insights into William Gibson, Thomas Armitage, and the “Peglar Papers” of the Franklin Expedition

By Glenn M. Stein

### INTRODUCTION

**A** PARTLY EXPOSED SKELETON OF A MEMBER of the Franklin Expedition, accompanied by papers belonging to naval petty officer Henry Peter Peglar (HMS *Terror*) was discovered by Leopold McClintock on the coast of King William Island in 1859. Previous researchers suggested the remains may have belonged, not to Peglar, but to his shipmate Thomas Armitage, based on the belief Armitage and Peglar served together from 1834–37. In “Scattered Memories and Frozen Bones: Revealing a Sailor of the Franklin Expedition, 1845–48,” Stein (2007) weighed the evidence of the skeleton’s identity between Armitage and another shipmate, William Gibson. For the first time, Armitage’s full naval service is presented, which proves he served just one year with Peglar prior to the Franklin Expedition and was illiterate up until the time he went to the Arctic. In contrast, Gibson had a much longer and more recent connection with Peglar. By considering further evidence, including an unpublished letter by Gibson and some of his personal documents, plus family letters and information, I am able to shed new light on Gibson, his family, and naval service. Finally, in this essay, I embarked on a handwriting comparison of the “Peglar Papers.” After separating out the like items evidently in Peglar’s handwriting, a juxtaposition of Gibson’s handwriting to the other handwriting within the papers found no favorable comparisons.

### WILLIAM GIBSON AND FAMILY

William Gibson was born in 1822 in Middlesex (London), the first and only son of Stuart Gibson (ca. 1795–1877) and Mary Tweedie Carlyle (ca. 1796, deceased 1830–36), who were married 2 February 1818, and in 1819 lived in St. Anne, Soho, Westminster. Stuart was a tailor and had a shop close by on Regent Street, where he made riding habits (women’s clothing for horseback riding) and must have had a wealthy clientele (T. Huygens, pers. comm. 2019; Huygens, n.d.). The Stuarts also had three daughters, Margaret Ann (1819–?), Charlotte Donaldson (1828–91), and Mary Ann Frances (ca. 1830–97). After

Stuart’s wife passed away, he remarried on 27 March 1837 to sixteen-year-old Mary Ann Mayfield (ca. 1821–51), who family stories claim, worked as a seamstress in his shop (Huygens, n.d.). Their children were James (ca. 1836–?), Margaret Ann (1837–39), Eleanor Eliza (1841–?), Stuart Jr. (1843–?), nameless child (1845–?), and Alfred (1846–74) (Huygens, n.d.).

### GIBSON AND THE *WANDERER*

William Gibson volunteered for the Royal Navy at Sheerness on 3 January 1840, aged 17 years and six months, where he worked being rated a captain’s cook. However, within days he was re-rated a boy 1st class. His first ship was the 16-gun brig-sloop *Wanderer* (Captain Joseph Denman, November 1839–August 1841), with a crew of approximately 110 souls (*Wanderer*, C,D,O, ADM 38/9306). William did not waste any time informing his father about his new surroundings in a letter addressed to “S. Gibson / No 11 Grenville / Street / Summers Town / London” (Grenville Street, Somers Town) (Fig. 1a–c); it was twice postmarked, first on 27 January in Devon, and again on 29 January (K. Scott and W. Morikawa, pers. comm. 2015):

Dear father

I received you leter on Friday last and you say that you wated fore an answer I sent one on Monday but I suppose it as miscaried or else you would ave received it I find out that I canot leav my alf pay as I am only on the Books as a first Clas boy but I can leave eleven shilings and ninepence by the Captains agent N° 14 great geary street westminster the Capain as riten to im about it and you ad betar see about it as soon as you can i said in my last leter that I has got no place to hang my amock up in but I have got one now it is a very bad one thow it is is [“is” again above] fastend to the staraord compreser by the main atchway and the first night I laid theare I had [“we all had” above] to get up about one a Clock to muster as the Joly Boat was taken away by somone the two nights folowing we had to let go an anchor I fare very well now as I mes with the steuard I have very nigh cut down a

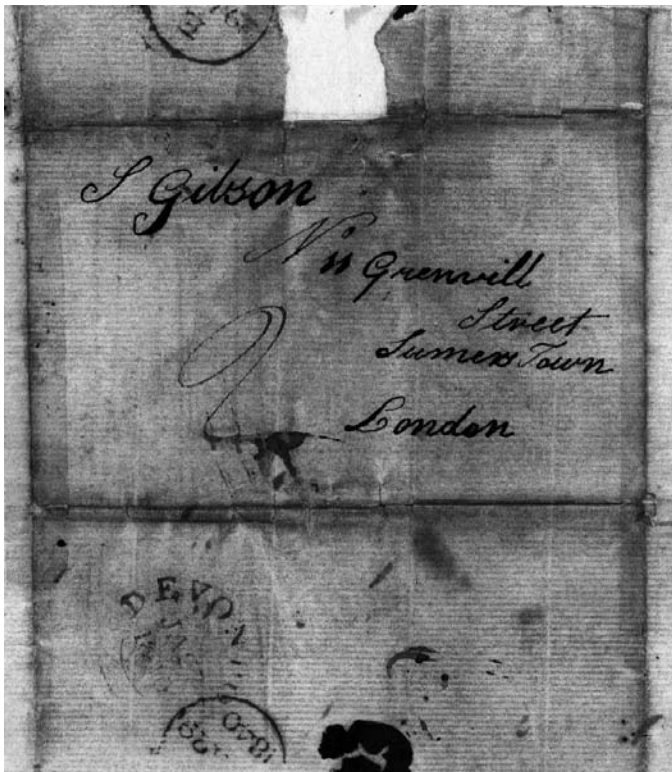


FIG. 1a. William Gibson's January 1840 letter to his father with address (courtesy W. Morikawa and K. Scott).

surloin of Beef in steiks since last mondy for myself as the steuard and Captains Been away I don't no how long we will be before we sail but I know the signalls been givin fore us to prepare fore sea I shall have fourteen shilings and thre pence a month besides five and thre pence a quater fore al my grog the other alf I stil continue to give away I have entered my nam as William Gibson give my love to mother and all my Relations

your Dutiful Son  
Wiliam Gibson

PS I give your Direction to the Captain 24 st anes Court  
Warder street London [St Anne's Court, Wardour Street]

With poor spelling and grammar, it can be fairly said Stuart's writing abilities were similar to those of his son (see below), and perhaps he did not or could not invest in his son's education. This newly branded sailor signed on as "William," although he was known as "Wiliam" to his family. Notably, he messed with a steward onboard the *Wanderer*—evidently Captain's Steward, Stephen Wise (China Medal 1840–42 Roll, ADM 171/12)—and thus enjoyed some fine cuts of beef.

During the next four and a half years, the crew fought enemies of the British Empire as well as those who robbed their fellow human beings of dignity—these were the slave traders along the Gallinas River, on the west African coast. The crew of the *Wanderer* not only captured slave ships

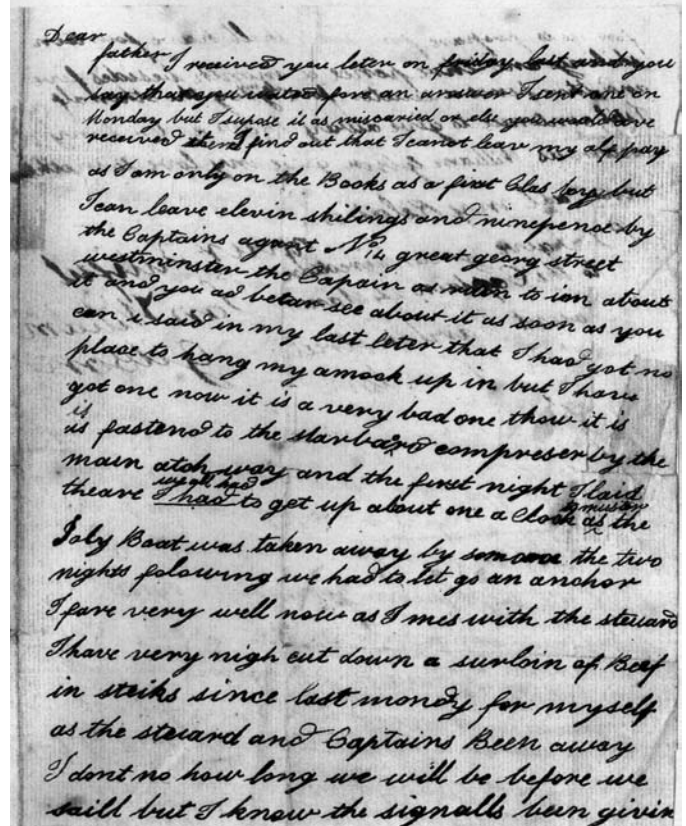


FIG. 1b. William Gibson's January 1840 letter to his father and page 1 (courtesy W. Morikawa and K. Scott).

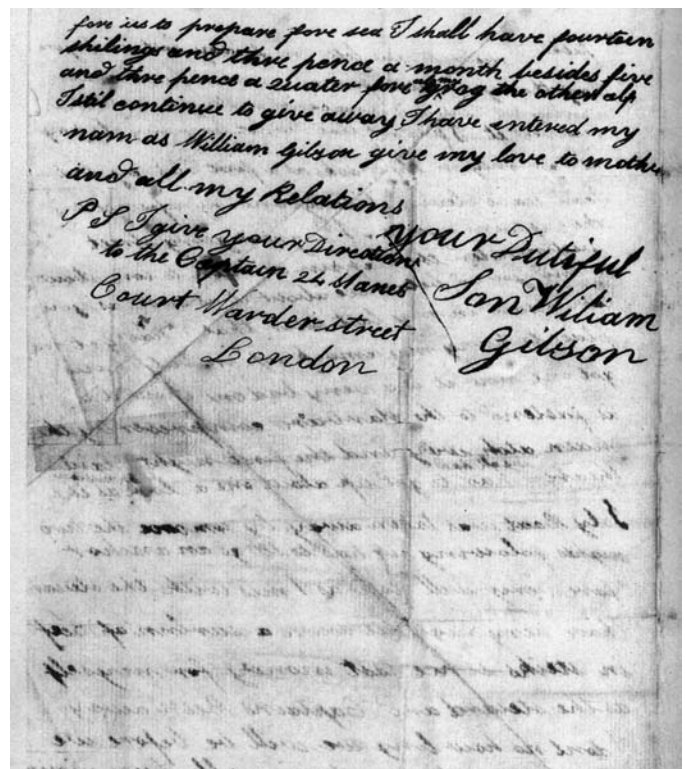


FIG. 1c. William Gibson's January 1840 letter to his father and page 2 (courtesy W. Morikawa and K. Scott).



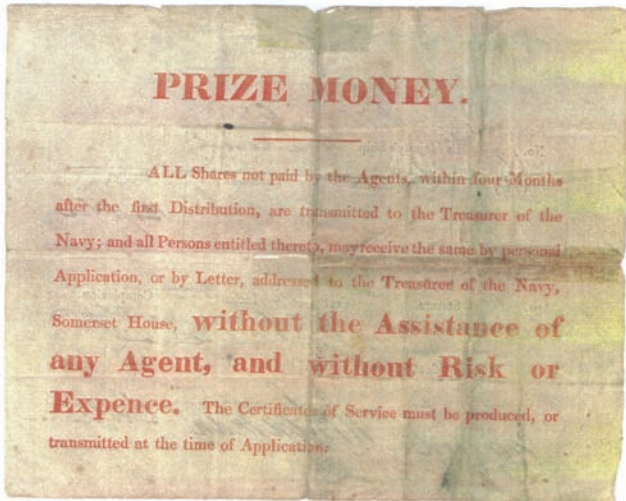


FIG. 2a. First Prize Money Certificate (front) for the captures of slave ships (courtesy W. Morikawa and K. Scott).

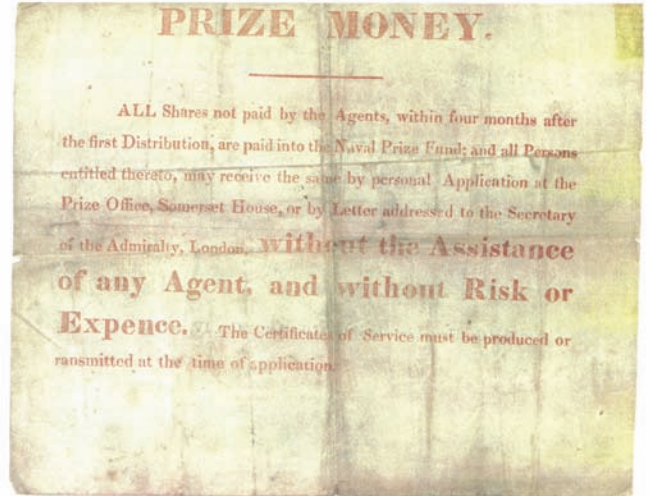


FIG. 2c. Second Prize Money Certificate (front) awarded for the captures of slave ships (courtesy W. Morikawa and K. Scott).



FIG. 2b. First Prize Money Certificate (back) awarded for the Wanderer's captures of slave ships along the Gallinas River. It attests to Gibson's "very good" conduct and is signed by Commander Joseph Denman. Since the money was paid on 25 February 1848, Gibson never lived to enjoy his reward (courtesy W. Morikawa and K. Scott).

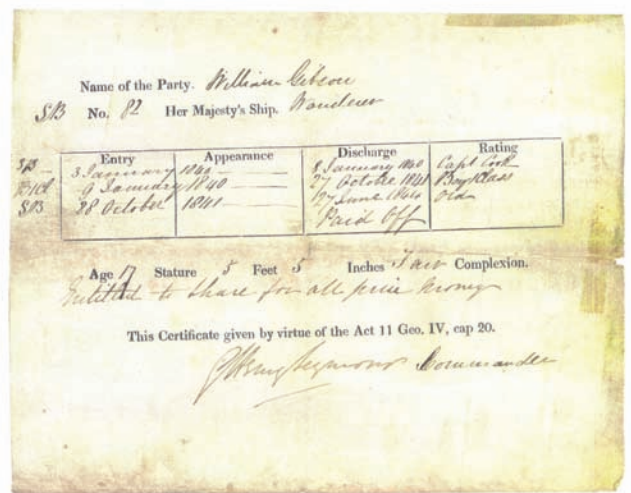


FIG. 2d. Second Prize Money Certificate (back) awarded for the capture of slave ships, which states Gibson's age, height, and complexion upon joining Wanderer in January 1840, and is signed by Commander George Henry Seymour (courtesy W. Morikawa and K. Scott).

(Fig. 2a–d), but also destroyed enclosures to confine slaves called barracoons. For the first time, instead of simply intercepting slavers as they entered or left harbors, direct action was taken to strike at the root of this barbaric trade (Lloyd, 1949; Winton, 1977). Wading through muddy brackish water and sleeping in damp clothes on swampy ground invited sickness and sixteen men were disabled by malaria (Winton, 1977).

By July 1842, Gibson had been rated an ordinary seaman for nine months and his ship now formed part of a squadron on the Yangtze River, participating in the last stages of the 1839–42 First Opium War. A body of seamen and marines from the squadron accompanied a force of more than 6600

soldiers attacking the city of Zhenjiang (Chinking) on the 21st. A certain Lieutenant James Fitzjames, of HMS *Cornwallis*, brought up some rockets and made good use of them during the assault; he was wounded afterwards, while attempting to fire off a Congreve rocket during a street battle (Hall and Bernard, 1847).

Mate George Henry Hodgson, a shipmate, also distinguished himself that day (Clowes, 1901). Promoted to lieutenant in December, Hodgson joined the *Wanderer* on 5 April 1843. Both Fitzjames and Hodgson later joined Franklin's last expedition (Cyriax, 1939).

By February 1844, Lieutenant Hodgson was part of a 150-man boat expedition from the *Wanderer*, the sloop

*Harlequin* and the East India Company's steamer *Diana*, attacking pirates in northern Borneo. Hodgson landed under heavy fire with his men in the *Wanderer's* cutter and carried a stockade mounting some brass guns, which were then embarked. (Course, 1966; Rutter, 1986).

### JOINING THE TERROR

When the *Wanderer* paid off on 27 June 1844, the men went their separate ways; however, in less than a year's time some of them would be reunited to begin a very different journey—to seek a Northwest Passage. Three former crew members of the *Wanderer* volunteered for the Franklin Expedition—all for service in HMS *Terror*. Henry Peter Peglar joined the ship on 11 March 1845, Hodgson the next day, and Gibson on the 19th (*Terror*, Muster, ADM 38/1962). Fitzjames was part of the enterprise too; now a commander, he captained HMS *Erebus* under Franklin. Hodgson must have been Fitzjames's friend, or at least made an impression on him, as he recommended Hodgson for an appointment (Cyriax, 1939).

While there is no evidence, I consider that Hodgson or Peglar could have spoken up for Gibson upon the latter volunteering for the expedition. In addition, it could well be that Gibson had a particular skill to offer. He signed on as the subordinate officers' steward (*Terror*, Muster, ADM 38/1962), being responsible to the warrant officers onboard (boatswain, engineer, and carpenter), but according to family lore he “went with Sir John Franklin to the North Pole [*sic*] as his musician” (Canavan, 1913). Though it is unlikely Gibson was specifically Franklin's musician, it was common for men to be tapped by officers for their musical abilities, especially for long voyages. Some such men performed their main roles as domestics. The *Bounty's* Captain William Bligh well understood the value of music at sea when he specifically signed on a partially sighted Irish fiddler “to help with relaxation and the preservation of healthy morale” (Proctor, 1992:66).

On 17 May 1845, William Gibson signed an allotment list, indicating his father (incorrectly shown as “Stewart”) being the recipient of part of his monthly pay while he was away (Allotment List, *Terror*, ADM 27/90), giving Stuart's residence as 23 Upper Ogle Street, St. Marylebone, London. On 19 May the *Erebus* and *Terror* set sail from England, and Gibson left his family behind forever.

Two weeks later, Stuart wrote to his son (Fig. 3), addressing the letter to “W<sup>m</sup> Gibson Seaman / Board of H.M.S *Terror* / on the arctic expedition / Aberdeen or elsewhere” (K. Scott and W. Morikawa, pers. comm. 2015). There are two 4 June postmarks, one of which is for Aberdeen, along with the notation “not at Aberdeen. Not called for.” Then in a different hand is “not at Aberdeen” “try Lerwick.” Lerwick is the main town and port of the Shetland Islands, northeast of the Scottish coast. Two Lerwick postmarks, one for 8 July and another for what at first appears to be 22 July. However, in the latter, the

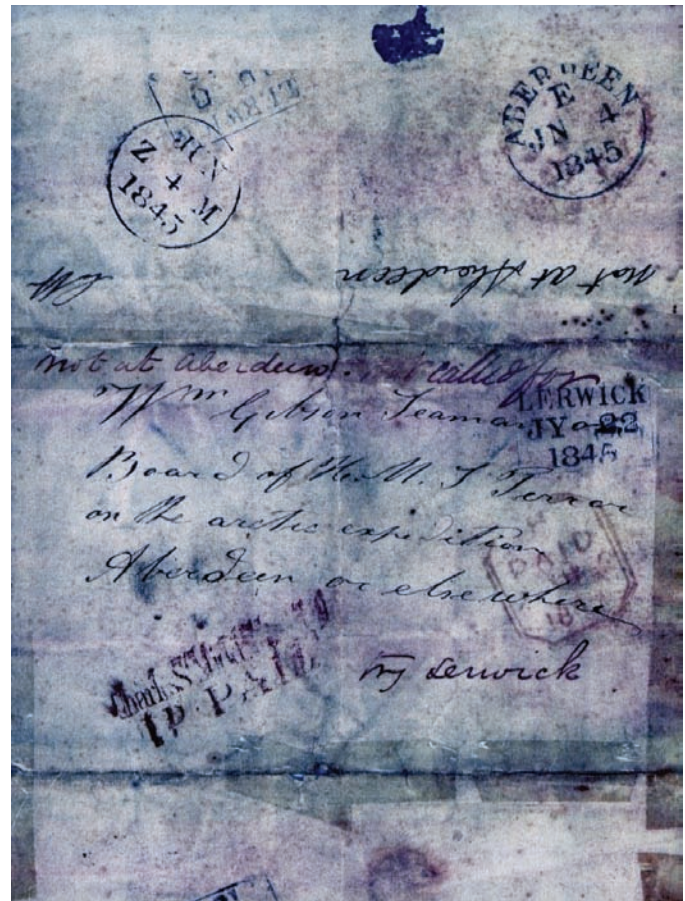


FIG. 3. Stuart Gibson's 2 June 1845 letter to William (courtesy W. Morikawa and K. Scott).

first number is struck through by hand, so it may actually indicate 2 July.

Monday June 2nd, 1845

My Dearly Beloved Son

I just this moment received your ever whelcolme letter and haste to write a line or two not knowing whether it will reach you or not I shall first speak about Miss Edwards to inform you however unpleasant it may be to your feelings but as a man you must bear it and not only bear it but conquer it for a guilt that would sacrifice me for all the sake of gold I should ever think unworthy of me which is the case with lizey [Lizzy] she has totally given up the thoughts of uniling [availing?] herself to you for haveing leaveing to your Father the half of your pay for she says you will have no mony to set up in Business with consequently she would have to work I hope My Dear Son that this will reach you before you leave I have told you the plain truth for I think it would not be right to keep you in ignorance I hope you will have more manhood than give even one passing sigh to such a selfish calculating girll for after that I am cirtain that a mared life would be any thing but a



Heaven I shall say no more upon that subject leaving it to your own good sense to direct my Dear Boy I was well pleased to see with what punctuallity you sent to me from the first part you tuched at Harry and Joe is well and on Board the Vernon and should you be so fortunate as to get through you may happen to meet for the Vernon hoists the admerals Flag on the Rio Station Your Sister Charlotte sends her kind love to you Mary Ann allso and indeed so does all your Friends at present My Son adue and may the God of your Fathers watch over guard and protect you my Son in the earnest wish of your affectionate Father

Stuart Gibson  
23 Upper Ogle Street  
Marylebone  
London

The letter never reached William and must have been returned to Stuart, so William never knew his girlfriend Lizzy Edwards had given up on him, due to half of his pay going to Stuart. She obviously wished to be fully taken care of by William and did not want to work. The observant father assured his son he had dodged a marital bullet. Stuart was pleased to have read about William's friends Harry and Joe, who were serving aboard the 50-gun HMS *Vernon*, flagship of Rear Admiral Samuel Hood Inglefield, CB. The *Vernon* was bound for the southeast coast of America Station as part of suppression of the slave trade. Stuart cautiously wrote, "should you be so fortunate to get through [the Northwest Passage] you may happen to meet [Harry and Joe]" in the *Vernon* at Rio de Janeiro.

Near the end of the letter, Stuart mentions William's sister Charlotte, who came to figure more prominently in this family saga after all the members of the Franklin Expedition were officially declared dead nine years later:

By A.O. [Admiralty Order] 18 January 1854 No 263 inclosing Notice from the Gazette, it is directed that if they are not heard of previous to 31 March 1854, the officers & crew of HMS *Terror* are to be removed from the Navy List & are to be considered as having died in the Service—Their wages are to be paid to their Relatives to that Date—By A.O. 1 April 1854 No. 1638 all Books & Papers are to be dispensed with (*Terror*, Muster, ADM 38/1962)

On 10 April 1854, the Department of the Accountant General of the Navy sent Stuart confirmation of receipt of his letter of inquiry to claim William's arrears of pay (Fig. 4), care of a Mr. Gellart, 95 Oxford Street, London (K. Scott and W. Morikawa, pers. comm. 2015). However, Stuart (whose occupation is shown as a tailor) is recorded in the actual claim document as living at 12 Upper Rathbone Place, Marylebone, London. Payment of an amount under £200 was approved on 16 June (Seamen's Effects Papers 1800–1860, ADM 44/G17/G4146, incorrectly shown as "Stewart").

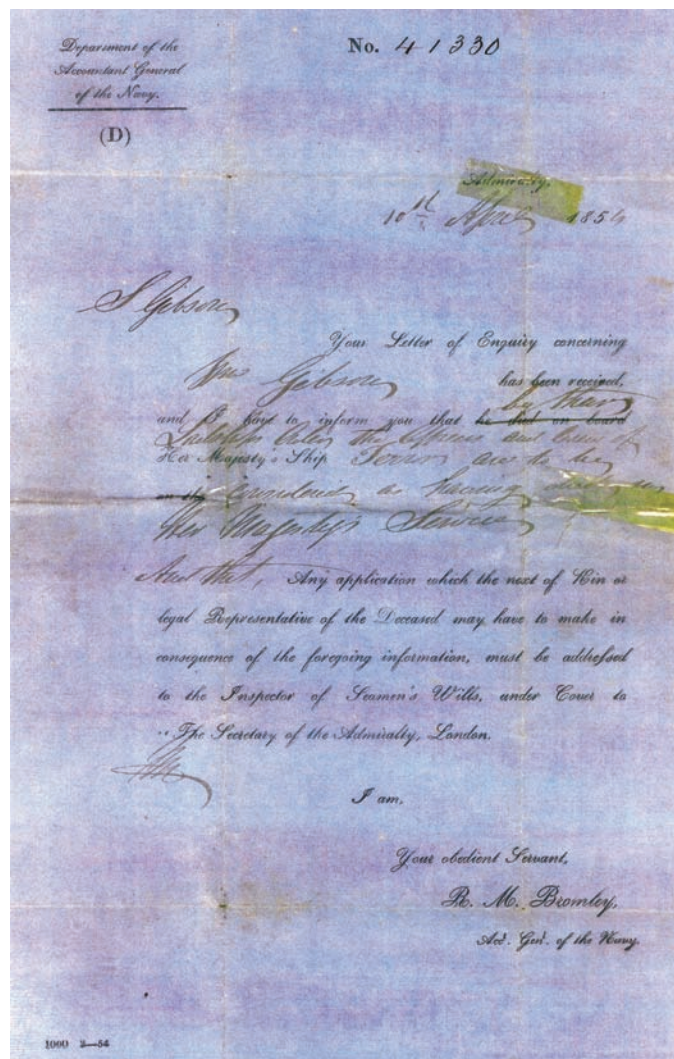


FIG. 4. The Department of the Accountant General of the Navy's confirmation of receipt of Stuart Gibson's letter of inquiry to claim William's arrears of pay (courtesy W. Morikawa).

Medallic recognition of William's naval service was also forthcoming. His China Medal 1840–42 (Fig. 5) was delivered on 28 February 1856, and although it is not recorded to whom, it was likely his married sister Charlotte, since the Arctic Medal 1818–55 was delivered on 24 June 1857 to "Charlotte D. James on behalf of the Father who is in Australia" (China Medal 1840–42 Roll, ADM 171/12; Arctic Medal 1818–55 Roll, ADM 171/9). The China Medal was officially impressed on the edge "\*\*\* WILLIAM GIBSON, HMS WANDERER \*\*\*" and exists in a private collection. The whereabouts of the Arctic Medal, issued unnamed, is unknown.

A widower since 1851, Stuart Gibson waited until after receiving William's arrears of pay before following his third daughter Mary Ann Frances to Australia, where she emigrated in 1848 (Huygens, n.d.). He took James, Eleanor Eliza, Stuart Jr., and Alfred with him, arriving in Adelaide on 25 November 1854 (T. Huygens, pers. comm. 2023). Stuart's eldest daughter, Charlotte Donaldson Gibson



FIG. 5. China Medal 1840–42 awarded to William Gibson, HMS *Wanderer* (courtesy Noonans Mayfair, London; ex-Glenn M. Stein Collection).

(1828–91), who had married John James in 1848, stayed in London, but followed her family to Australia in 1858 aboard the *General Hewett* (T. Huygens and K. Scott, pers. comm. 2015).

Stuart's undated letter to Charlotte, probably sent ca. 1856, reveals both his inner turmoil and family difficulties to such an extent that he wishes he never left England (K. Scott and W. Morikawa, pers. comm. 2015):

Charlotte My Dear Child My love to you & your Husband

My dear child some time after your most wholesome letter I received a parcell from M<sup>r</sup> W Bain by the ship Hoogly [Hooghly] likewise a letter for myself and allso M<sup>r</sup> Bain's by the same ship but as I afterwards learnt that she had to go to Calio before her return to England I rather think this will reach you before the Hoogly arrives therefore I write this to beg of you as you have made up your mind to come here to make a further application to Park Street for there is to be still one ship a month till next October I am very sorry to say that I cannot do anything myself toward helping you out I am not with Mary Ann for I have left her a second time but I do not wish to trouble you with my trials and sorrows I shall not say anything about it I wish I had never left England [which] I shall be happy to see once before I die if should please the Lord it is the only thing that would give me the least gleam of comfort I have not

seen Stuart [junior] for twelve months I have left the Peninsula and at present living at the Port [Adelaide] I have Alfred with me for he is not strong enough to get work the place is well enough for people that is young and strong and healthy they may do but for the like of one God help them but however I shall still hope there I dont know what to say but still you can write to Mary Ann she and her Husband both promised that they would send for you and held that as an inducement me to live with them but as I have already written I do [not] wish to trouble you for you have got enough of your own trouble but however try Park Street again and try Mary Ann give My love to the children dear little Charlotte how I miss her dear little company how she used to com up to sing to her old Grandfather there I cannot write anymore My love to your John the children all every one remember me kindly to all my relatives Adué God all Highly bless and keep you in his holy keeping is the wish and fervent prayer of your affectionate Father

Stuart Gibson

Direct

Stuart Gibson Tailor

Port Adleaid [Adelaide] South Australia

PS I shall take it kindly of any of my relatives to write to me Adué God bless you all and Dear old England too SG

At some point, Alfred came to find work as a herder or shearer at Ned's Corner, on the Murray River (one of Edward Meade Bagot's properties), about 200 miles east of Port Adelaide. However, Alfred eventually went the way of his adventurous half-brother William and went with explorer Ernest Giles on his second expedition into Central Australia (Giles, 1889). In his memoirs, Giles (1889:28) mentions a conversation with Gibson on 21 April 1874:

I casually remarked that Wills had a brother who also lost his life in the field of discovery. He had gone out with Sir John Franklin in 1845. Gibson then said, "Oh! I had a brother who died with Franklin at the North Pole [*sic*], and my father had a deal of trouble to get his pay from the government.

Giles was referring to explorer William John Wills, who was a first cousin of Lieutenant Henry Thomas Dundas Le Vesconte in HMS *Erebus* (Sullivan, 2009). The following day, Alfred went in search for water and was never seen again. The Gibson Desert, into which he disappeared, was named after him (Byrne, 2016).

Stuart was approaching 80 and had now lost two sons to exploring expeditions at opposite ends of the Earth. Within three years he went to his grave at the age of 82 on 22 January 1877 in Melbourne (Huygens, n.d.).



## SKELETON IN THE SNOW

On 25 May 1859, McClintock came upon a partly exposed skeleton (Fig. 6) on the coast of King William Island, 5.5 km (3.4 miles) southeast of the tip of Gladman Point (Stenton, 2022). McClintock fitted together several fragments of uniform and clothing and was able to determine exactly what the man had worn. These fragments convinced McClintock that the man had either been a steward or officer's servant, right down to "the loose bow-knot in which his neck-handkerchief was tied not being used by seamen or officers" (McClintock, 1881:235). McClintock assumed the skeleton probably belonged to Petty Officer Henry Peglar, captain of the foretop, HMS *Terror*, since a pocketbook found nearby contained Peglar's seaman's certificate and a narrative of his sea service, evidently written by Peglar (McClintock, 1881). There were also various papers written in two handwritings (McClintock, 1881). Historians Richard Cyriax and A.G.E. Jones questioned McClintock's assumption the skeleton belonged to Peglar, with their argument centering on the uniform (Cyriax and Jones, 1954). Peglar was never a steward or officer's servant in the Royal Navy, and it seems highly improbable a petty officer 1st class would don the uniform of a lowly domestic. Seemingly, the only other possibility is the clothing situation was desperate and Peglar wore whatever was on hand. However, the scene near Gladman Point also divulged an important clue missed by Cyriax and Jones (1954). Nearby the skeleton was a half sovereign dated 1844, a sixpence dated 1831, a horn pocket comb containing some light brown hairs, the pocketbook, and a small clothes brush (McClintock, 1881). "The last item has particular significance: a clothes brush is *just* the sort of thing a *real* steward or officer's servant would have in his possession" (Stein, 2007:229).

## THOMAS ARMITAGE

If the skeleton was not Peglar, who was it, and how did that person come to possess Peglar's papers? Cyriax and Jones (1954) conjectured he could have been a friend and someone entrusted with Peglar's seaman's certificate and other papers. They believed Thomas Armitage, gunroom steward in the *Terror*, may have been such a person. Cyriax and Jones (1954) only researched some of his naval service. This essay deepens the investigation by assembling a comprehensive picture of Armitage's naval career:

*born:* ca. December 1805–07

*baptized:* 24 April 1807, St. Mary's Church, Chatham, Kent

*parents:* Thomas and Jane Armitage

*wife:* Cecilia (née Murray) Armitage; married in Gillingham Parish, Kent, by Vicar J. Page, 2 October 1826; his parents Thomas and Jane Armitage were witnesses (Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre,



FIG. 6. Partly exposed skeleton in the snow (Wagner, 1861; courtesy Logan Zachary Collection).

2006–23; Seamen's Effects Papers 1800–1860, ADM 44/A10/A2335)

*seamen's effects:* Armitage's back pay was under £200; payment to his widow Cecilia, 9 Cage Lane, Chatham, approved 26 June 1854

*medal entitlements:* Arctic Medal 1818–55 sent 2 March 1857 (presumably to Cecilia); DD/2335 (DD = discharged dead) is noted on the roll (ADM 171/9), with this number relating to the claim for his back pay

*Royal Navy Service*

*Bulwark* / Boy 3<sup>rd</sup> Class, 9 January 1821–27 March 1822  
*Gloucester* / Boy 2<sup>nd</sup> Class, 28 March 1822–5 December 1822

*Briton* / Boy 3<sup>rd</sup> Class & 2<sup>nd</sup> Class, 6 December 1822–30 November 1823

—— / Ordinary Seaman, 1 December 1823–31 August 1825

—— / Captain's Steward, 1 September 1825–7 September 1826

[Armitage married on 2 October 1826 and perhaps worked ashore for several years.]

*Gannet* / Gunroom Steward, 7 May 1834 (volunteer/Sheerness)–23 June 1835

*Serpent* / Captain's Steward, 24 June 183 – 14 March 1836

*Hercules* / Gunroom Steward, 5 March 1837 (volunteer/Sheerness)–14 January 1839

*Cleopatra* / Gunroom Steward, 11 February–14 October 1839

*Fantome* / Captain's Steward, 22 November 1839 (volunteer/Chatham)–6 May 1842

—— / Ship's Cook, 7 May 184–31 December 1842

—— / Commander's Steward, 1 January 1843–20 October 1843

*Dee* / Gunroom Steward, 8 July 1844 (volunteer/Chatham)–25 April 1845 (own request)

*Terror* / Gunroom Steward, 29 April 1845–Discharged Dead, Franklin Expedition

Thomas Armitage is listed as “Armitage” in the musters and description books of the *Bulwark*, *Gloucester*, *Hercules*, *Cleopatra*, *Fantome*, *Dee*, and *Terror* (ADM 37 and ADM 38), but only with the alias “Harmitage” in *Gannet*’s description book (*Gannet*, C,D,O, ADM 37/9149). However, this alias appears along with “Armitage” in the Registers of Seamen’s Services (ADM 29/15), Seamen’s Effects Papers 1800–1860 (ADM 44/A10/A2335), and Arctic Medal 181–55 Roll (ADM 171/9).

During the above research, it was interesting to note Armitage’s “very bad” character during his time in the *Fantome*, 22 November 1839–20 October 1843 (*Fantome*, DB, ADM 38/8093), being in marked contrast to his “good” character when he paid off from *Hercules*, *Cleopatra*, and *Dee* (*Hercules*, ADM 37/9212; *Fantome*, ADM 38/8093; *Dee*, ADM 38/7946). However, a man assessed with good character merely equates with an average disposition, whereas very good and exemplary character ratings are used for higher appraisals.

Among the papers found by McClintock were writings in a hand different than Peglar’s, some of which made reference to “the old City of Cumanar” (Stein, 2007:230). Presumably this was Cumaná, Venezuela, where both Peglar and Armitage visited in the *Gannet* from late 1834 until January 1835 (McClintock, 1881; Cyriax and Jones, 1954; Jones, 1984). HMS *Gannet* was a handy 18-gun brig-sloop with approximately 130 crew (RootsWeb, n.d.; Douglas-Morris, 1987). Although this suggests a connection between Armitage and the skeletal remains, it was incorrect of Cyriax and Jones (1954:194) to state:

Armitage was Gunroom Steward in HMS *Gannet* [*sic*; *Gannet*] for the greater part of the time that Peglar served in that ship, for he joined her at Sheerness on 7 May 1834, and was discharged to HMS *Serpent* on 23 June 1837, whereas Peglar joined her on 4 April 1834, and was paid off in February 1838.

In actuality, Armitage was only aboard *Gannet* from 7 May 1834 to 23 June 1835, thus, Peglar and Armitage spent far less time serving together than previously believed (*Gannet*, C,D,O, ADM 37/9149). By the time of the Franklin Expedition, neither man had served together for 10 years.

Stein (2007) put forth another candidate for the skeleton, the steward William Gibson. It is significant that Stein uncovered that Armitage had only served just over a year with Peglar before the Arctic, since by contrast, Gibson had the much longer and more recent connection with Peglar of four and a half years (1840–44). In addition, as a deck sailor, rather than a domestic like Armitage, Gibson had much closer contact aboard the *Wanderer* with a first-class petty officer like Peglar, in her boats and onshore, serving in China, and the punitive operations against slavers and pirates (Stein, 2007). Also, if Gibson acted as a musical

entertainer onboard *Terror*, he would have been well known among the ship’s company (Canavan, 1913). Notably, when dealing with Armitage and Gibson, as far as:

...surviving records permitted, the author researched the service careers of the remaining stewards (two on *Terror* and four on *Erebus*), to determine if any of them crossed paths with Peglar during their time in the Royal Navy. None had any evident links to Peglar.

Stein, 2007:229

The exception to this exercise was William Fowler (alias William Samuel), a native of Bristol, Gloucester, paymaster and purser’s steward, *Erebus*. Fowler was paid off HMS *Ocean* on 1 October 1844 and was 26 years of age upon joining *Erebus* on 15 March 1845 (*Erebus*, Muster, ADM 38/672). The *Ocean*’s two description books (ADM 38/8629 and 38/8630) were combined, contain upwards to 1500 names, and are unindexed, so were therefore not examined. Interestingly, in 1854, Dr. John Rae acquired two (empty) tin seaman’s certificate cases from Inuit at Repulse Bay, one of which had the name “Fowler” scratched in cursive script at its base (Rae, 2014:353). Both Fowler’s true name and alias appear on the Arctic Medal roll, although there is no record of the medal having been issued (Arctic Medal 1818–55 Roll, ADM 171/9).

In 2019, a single human bone was found at the site where the Peglar skeleton was discovered by McClintock in 1859. It was a left first metatarsal bone (the bone in the foot just behind the big toe).

The metatarsal was intact and in good condition apart from the post-mortem loss of the distal end, which appeared to have been gnawed off by a small animal. DNA analysis yielded mitochondrial (U5a2a) and Y-chromosome (R1b) haplogroups indicative of a male of European ancestry.

Stenton, 2022:11

The next logical step would be to conduct DNA comparisons of the Gibson family descendants and the DNA from the recovered bone, thus confirming or denying the skeleton’s identity as that of William Gibson.

Turning to the “Peglar Papers” for a moment, one sheet includes “O’ death wheare is thy sting / the grave at comfort cove” (Royal Museums Greenwich, n.d.b). There is a Comfort Cove on Ascension Island, where Peglar and Gibson visited in the *Wanderer* from August to September 1840 and again in 1841. The island became a base for ships’ crews to rest and recuperate from anti-slave trade operations. Between the 1830s and 1860s, the site chosen to quarantine fever victims was known as Comfort Cove (also called Comfortless Cove, the name it retains today). Although the reference to “the grave” could correspond to little graveyards dotting that place (Stein, 2007:230), Russell Potter (2014:4) points out “the recollection of this place could have been the cause for a sailor’s newly



applying the name to a place in the Arctic, perhaps a graveyard adjacent to an onshore sick-camp for Franklin's men". In that regard, Potter theorizes these lines are "part of an account of, or eulogy for, someone who has died and has or is to be buried" (Potter, 2014:4).

The perplexities of dealing with historical records are further demonstrated in reading McClintock's description of the remains:

The skeleton—now perfectly bleached—was lying upon its face, the limbs and smaller bones [were] either dissevered or gnawed away by smaller animals. . . . This victim I supposed to have been a young man, slightly built, and perhaps above the common height.

McClintock, 1881:235

As I previously wrote:

How did McClintock, a Royal Navy Captain, without any medical background, determine the age, build and height of a skeleton lying down, particularly with its limbs either separated or eaten away? Neither Armitage or Peglar could be described as "young" when they died; in 1848, Armitage was about 40 years old and Peglar about 36 years of age.

Stein, 2007:229

Although the skeleton cannot offer any hard evidence respecting its identity, Cyriax and Jones (1954) stated Peglar's height in 1834 was 5' 7½" and Armitage was 5' 9". However, I discovered Armitage's statures upon joining the *Fantome* (November 1839) and *Dee* (July 1844) were both recorded as 5' 6"—three inches shorter than several years before (*Fantome*, DB, ADM 38/8093; *Dee*, C,D,O, ADM 38/7946). At age 17, Gibson was described as 5' 5", and given his youth, he most likely had more growing to do (*Wanderer*, ADM 38/9306).

#### THE "PEGLAR PAPERS"

Excluding the seaman's certificate, which was only filled out by persons of authority, the "Peglar Papers" show what is assumed to be Peglar's handwriting and that of one other person. For completeness, I made a determined search for any verifiable samples of Peglar's handwriting, but none were found. To this end, although no allotment lists exist between 1813–29, all other possible lists for his ships were searched (Jones, 1984): *Ramillies*, 1830 (just two of *Ramillies*' men are within HMS *Talavera*); *Gannet*, 1834; *Temeraire*, 1838; *Ocean*, 1838; *Wanderer*, 1840; and *Terror*, 1845 (ADM 27/90). Peglar did not make any allotments during these years, and apparently was not married, as payment of his back pay was approved on 28 June 1854 to his widowed sister, Sarah Barrett, of 25 Paris Street, Lambeth, Surrey (Seamen's Effects Papers 1800–1860, ADM 44/P18/P4350). His China Medal was delivered to

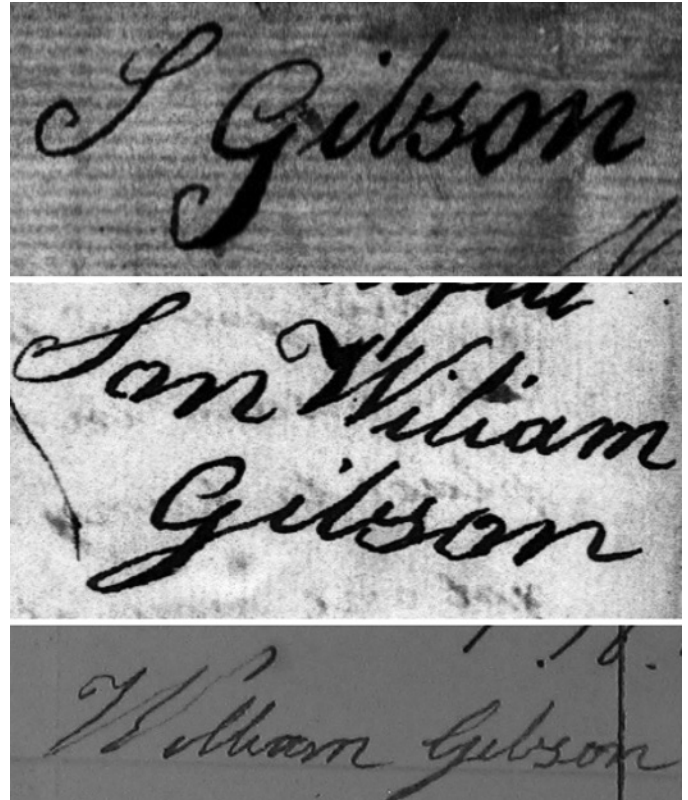


FIG. 7. (top and middle) From Gibson's January 1840 letter to his father Stuart, where he signed as "William" and (bottom) Gibson's signature as "William" in the *Terror*'s allotment list, 17 May 1845 (courtesy W. Morikawa and K. Scott; ADM 27/90).

this sister on 23 May 1857, with the Arctic Medal being delivered on the same day to his legal representative, likely also Sarah (China Medal 1840–42 Roll, ADM 171/12; Arctic Medal 1818–55 Roll, ADM 171/9).

The text in Peglar's hand includes: 1) an unofficial narrative of his service with the Royal Navy and East India Company was, no doubt, written by Peglar; the handwriting is clear, though the spelling is poor; 2) words of a sea shanty (song), dated 21 April 1847 and written in the identical hand of the narrative of sea service; 3) a London address; and 4) the words "Sentimental Song." The handwritings of the last two compares favorably with the previous one. Seven additional pieces of paper have writings in a different hand. Finally, there are also several small pieces of paper devoid of writing, some of which have been stitched together with cotton. (Royal Museums Greenwich, n.d.b; Cyriax and Jones, 1954).

Stein (2007:229) discovered Armitage's 1826 marriage certificate features "X his mark," bearing out that, at the time, he was illiterate (Kent Online Parish Clerks, 2006–23; Seamen's Effects Papers 1800–1860. ADM 44/A10/A2335), it was thought there was no way of knowing if he learned to read and write between 1826 and the 1840s. More recently, I researched all the allotments Armitage made (to his wife) during his entire service: *Hercules*, 1837; *Fantome*, 1840; *Dee*, 1844; and *Terror*, 1845. Each one was

signed with an “X” (Allotment Lists, ADM 27/53/4, 27/68/5, 27/87/93, 27/90/92), and it seems quite doubtful after all those years of illiteracy, that Armitage would suddenly be moved to learn to read and write in the Arctic.

Proceeding to William Gibson, I acquired samples of Gibson’s writing from two sources: 1) his January 1840 letter to his father Stuart; and 2) his signature in the *Terror*’s allotment book (W. Morikawa and K. Scott, pers. comm. 2015; ADM 27/90).

To understand how to compare William Gibson’s handwriting and that found in the “Peglar Papers,” it is important to keep in mind differences which occur in a person’s handwriting may be due to stylistic changes within a single piece of writing, as well as how individual letters are used (Royal Museums Greenwich, n.d.c). Therefore, I paid particular attention to certain upper and lowercase letters scribed by Gibson (Figs. 1a–c, 7): 1) S varies once in the five times it appears, 2) G varies each of the four times it appears, and 3) W varies twice in the three times it appears. Finally, the uppercase N appears just twice, as part of “N<sup>o</sup>” in street addresses, so it is unknown if Gibson would have written it differently in some other use, such as at the beginning of a sentence or a proper noun. Notably, there are two variants of d present throughout the text, while the t is consistently crossed with only short strokes.

After close examination of all the pertinent writings in the “Peglar Papers,” Gibson’s handwriting was not a match for any of them, with telltale differences noted between the letters I, L, M, P, R, S, W, r, and t. I can therefore, confidently state that between this comparison and Armitage’s proven illiteracy up to 1845, it is highly unlikely either man wrote any of the text within the “Peglar Papers.”

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper is dedicated to the late A.G.E. Jones in appreciation of his assistance, kindness, and encouragement. Thank you to K. Asplin for his skill and professionalism. I am indebted to T. Huygens, W. Morikawa, and K. Scott, all of whom kindly shared knowledge about their ancestors. My thanks also to P. John, D.A.E. Morris, S. Nicholson, Noonans Mayfair, Dr. R.A. Potter, FRGS, Royal Museums, Greenwich.

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