

Additional documents and survey on the Franklin sites of Beechey Island, Nunavut, Canada

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ABSTRACT. Documents are presented adding further insights into a survey of gravesite memorials on Beechey Island, as well as locating the additional sites of the Franklin expedition noted in the Franklin search literature. These are augmented with current photographs.

Contents

Introduction	193
Documents	193
Discussion concerning the gravesites	195
Other Franklin sites	196
Acknowledgements	199
References	199

Introduction

In Brian D. Powell's valuable survey of Beechey Island memorials (Powell 2006; supplemented by Barr 2007), the gravesite memorials relating to the Franklin and Franklin search expeditions are surveyed. The discussion also includes the uncertainty of the placement of the headboards for the grave of Thomas Morgan and the memorial for the French Lieutenant Joseph René Bellot. Powell indicates that it is believed, but not certain, that the existing replacement headboard for Morgan is in the correct position. An additional document, a Beechey Island map by W.J.S. Pullen, is strong evidence that the Bellot memorial headboard was west (inland) and therefore the Morgan headboard should be on the east (shore) side of the three Franklin expedition graves. The headboard locations implied in other published engravings, especially from *The Illustrated London News*, have also raised questions about these five and possibly even six 'graves' (Bellot's body was neither recovered nor buried). The additional evidence is discussed here as an extension to Powell's survey.

While Powell's survey is concerned with the memorials, there are additional Franklin sites on Beechey Island located by the early Franklin searchers of 1850–1854. The most famous of this group is the remnant of the 'Franklin can cairn.' Locations for many of these sites are still identifiable and were observed and photographed by the author in August 2008.

Documents

Beechey Island and its environs were surveyed by Commander William John Samuel Pullen of *North Star* during the Franklin search, and the result published in the Arctic Blue Books series (Pullen 1855: opposite 794). A section including Beechey Island is presented here as Fig. 1. Another detail was earlier reproduced in Savours

1999: opposite 183). The map is entitled 'Arctic Sea: Barrow Strait: Erebus Bay: Surveyed By Commr W.J.S. Pullen: 1854.' The complete map insert is 620 × 510 mm (2.0' × 1'8"). *North Star* under Pullen's command served as a depot ship from 1852–1854 for the eastern portion of the Franklin search. The map notations include the position 'North Star wintered 1853.4', and 'Mr. Bellot's grave'. Bellot died on 18 August 1853 when he disappeared after being blown into the sea during a blizzard. The map does not show the Thomas Morgan gravesite. Morgan died on 22 May 1854 from illness probably due to the lack of food and scurvy on board *Investigator*, of which he was a crew member. From these facts the map appears to have been finalised by the spring of 1854, that is after Bellot's death but before that of Morgan. In Pullen's 'Proceedings ...', he reports on 17 March 1853 '... having pretty nearly completed the outline of the bay, to show the position of the ice and 'Mary,' yacht ...' (Pullen 1855: 746). Overall, the map covers Beechey Island and the Devon Island coast from Cape Riley to Cape Spencer (southeast to northwest of Beechey Island). Remnants of Franklin expedition sites (1845–1846) were also found, though not noted on this map, at both Capes. The bay itself has been called either 'Erebus Bay' or 'Erebus and Terror Bay' interchangeably from the time of the Franklin search, but the latter name is now in use on Canadian Government topographical maps.

The second document is the illustration for 'Sketches from Captain Austin's Arctic Expedition' from *The Illustrated London News* for 29 November 1851 (*The Illustrated London News* 1851c: 637) (Fig. 2). This is among the earliest images of the three headboards, and is the only one found showing the Franklin can cairn illustrated during the Franklin search period.

A third document is a map of Beechey Island published by Sherard Osborn (Osborn 1865: 298) (Fig. 3). Osborn arrived in command of *Pioneer* at Beechey Island on 27 August 1850 and left on 5 September. He also describes Franklin sites in the environs of the island at Cape Spencer, toward Gascoigne Inlet and Caswell's Tower; and reprints a report by Edwin Jesse De Haven of 4 October 1851 including description of Beechey Island sites, that is in general consistent with those of Osborn and Elisha Kent Kane (Kane 1854). The map is part of a reconstruction of

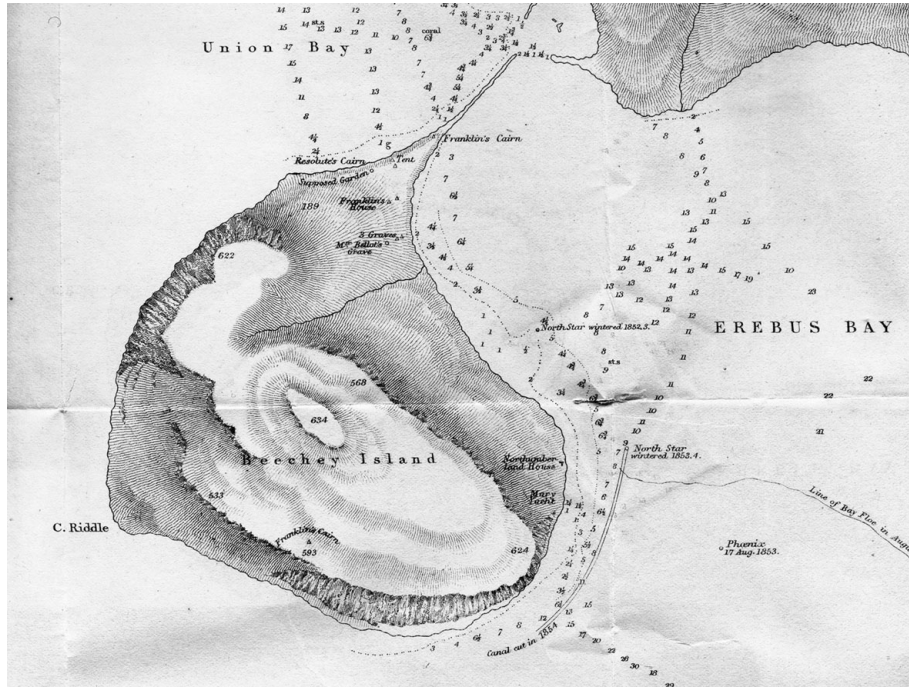


Fig. 1. Detail of Beechey Island (Pullen 1855: op. 794).

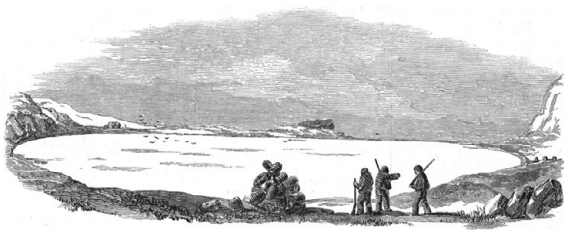


Fig. 2. Beechey Island and Erebus and Terror Bay, 29 November 1851, *The Illustrated London News* (1851c: 637).

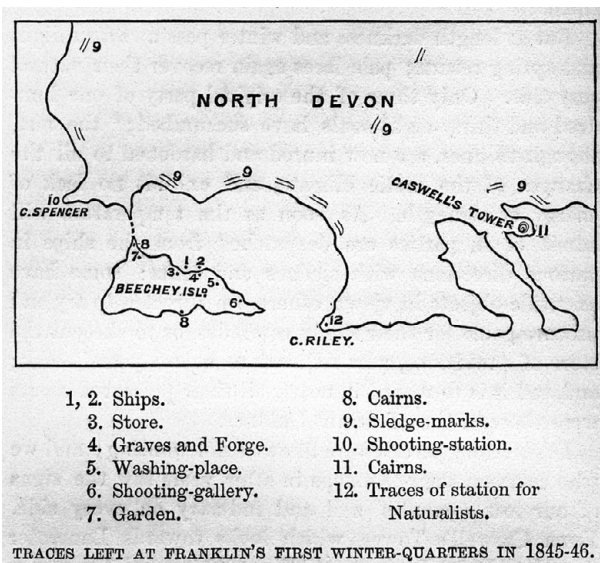


Fig. 3. 'Traces Left at Franklin's First Winter-Quarters in 1845-46' (Osborn 1865: 298).

Franklin's stay at Beechey Island (Osborn 1865: 80-99, 232-236, 281-317).

These three illustrations are supplemented in the discussion below by other important sources for the Beechey Island Franklin sites.

An earlier and sketchier map than that of Osborn, but very similar with regard to the relative positions of the Franklin sites, is found in *The Illustrated London News* for 20 September 1851 (*The Illustrated London News* 1851a: 348). The three graves are also illustrated in the 4 October 1851 issue, but the identifications are erroneously given as Torrington, Hartnell, and Braine from west to east (inland to shore). A figure of 'Meat-Cans and Sacks. . .,' identified as being the discoveries at Cape Riley, and other Franklin relics are on the same page (*The Illustrated London News* 1851b: 409-410).

Kane was a member of the first Grinnell expedition in *Advance* under the command of De Haven. He also was at Beechey Island from 27 August to 5 September 1850. His account is especially noted for his vivid, journalistic descriptions including of the news of the discovery of the Franklin graves (Kane 1854: 155-175). Powell appropriately quotes his version of the headboard inscriptions, as Kane's are the most extensive and hence appears most complete of the contemporary accounts.

Peter Sutherland similarly was at Beechey Island from 27 August to 5 September 1850 as part of William Penny's expedition in *Lady Franklin*. His account of 26 August also uniquely sketches and describes a stone lined tent ring left by the Franklin expedition about six miles north of Cape Spencer, a site that might well still remain. He also includes the most detailed contemporary sketch of the

three headboards at the gravesite with their inscriptions, as well as describing the numerous relics found on the ground (Sutherland 1852: 291–317).

Emile Frédéric de Bray was at Beechey Island in *Resolute* from 10 to 14 August 1852 and was in transit 25 May to 27 August 1854. He was the second Frenchman to join the Franklin search efforts, and visited the island to participate in the construction of a memorial for his countryman Bellot. De Bray's account also includes a map. Unfortunately, the published version of the De Bray map is not clear. About half the labels for the various Franklin sites are not easily readable. The map shows only three 'tombes' and that suggests that it was made based on his 1852 visit rather than later as there were five gravesites in place in 1854 (De Bray 1992: 42–43, 169–177).

George M'Dougall was at Beechey Island from 11 July to 27 August 1854. His account uniquely records the inscriptions on the gravesite headboards of the Bellot memorial and the Morgan grave (M'Dougall 1857: 430–40, reprinted in Powell 2006: 330).

Allen Young visited Beechey Island in 25–26 August 1875 as commander of the *Pandora* expedition. Thanks in particular to the accompanying artist Georg de Wilde, engravings were published in *The Illustrated London News* (including ones on the descriptive tablets now at sites on Beechey Island) and photographs in Young's book. The Beechey Island photographs are of Cape Riley, the yacht *Mary*, the graves, the Franklin cenotaph, and Northumberland House. The yacht *Mary* was the personal property of John Ross, who sailed it to Beechey Island in 1850 as part of his search efforts, and left it there as an emergency vessel for future use by any shipwrecked crews (Kane 1854: 162; Osborn 1865: 85). The one photograph of the gravesite is somewhat blurred and damaged (*The Illustrated London News* 1875; Young 1876: 40–43).

A central premise of this article is that Pullen map is unmatched as a primary source for the Beechey Island Franklin sites. Pullen as commander of the *North Star*, the primary support ship based at Beechey Island for two years during the Franklin Search, spent far more time in the immediate vicinity relative to other published searchers and his map is the result of the one formal survey conducted of the area during the period. All the other descriptions, maps, and sketches were prepared in limited time. In addition, it is reasonable to assume that Pullen also had more extensive access to those of his fellow officers that made the initial observations in 1850. In the following section on Franklin sites, the accuracy of the Pullen map is also validated by the simple fact that the author on the ground was able to go directly to, and identify, ground disturbances for each position on the map.

Discussion concerning the gravesites

The three Franklin gravesite memorials are reviewed by Powell, and details are more fully documented from the

exhumations done in 1984 and 1986 by Beattie and Geiger (1988). The position of the graves from west to east is Braine, Hartnell, and Torrington. These relative positions are as given by Kane, Sutherland, and De Bray, while the 4 October 1851 issue of *The Illustrated London News* and Osborn have Braine in the middle (*The Illustrated London News* 1851b: 409; Osborn 1865: 90). Any question with regard to the correct placement of the headboards was resolved by Beattie's exhumations discovering nameplates on the coffins. It is worth repeating Powell's point that the replacement headboards of 1993 for Hartnell and Braine were transposed from their proper positions, possibly following Osborn, and these have not as of August 2008, been corrected.

The current gravesites have the Morgan headboard to the west of the three Franklin graves and an unmarked gravesite to the east. Powell quotes from M'Dougall (1857: 433–434) that a fifth headboard was a memorial to Bellot, and notes as follows. 'It is believed, although the evidence is uncertain, that Morgan's body is indeed at the position of the 1993 headboard' (Powell 2006: 331). The evidence is unsupportive for the current location of the Morgan headboard. There is no document cited by Powell or known to this author that clearly indicates the placement of the Morgan headboard prior to the replacements of 1975–1976. Hobson (1993: 292) presents a 1974 photograph showing a rounded headboard (this appears to be the one on the far left in Powell 2006: 330, Fig. 10) to the west and a 'kitchen door' headboard to the east (second from right in Powell 2006; Fig. 10), but they were not directly or unambiguously identified as Morgan's or Bellot's.

The placements of the Bellot headboard to the west of the Franklin graves and the locales of other Franklin sites are powerfully supported by the Pullen map. It is submitted that the map notations of distinctly separate symbols at the gravesites adjacent to the two labels, as seen in Fig. 1, do indicate that Pullen was identifying two separate items and therefore are meaningful. Furthermore, in the case of the Bellot headboard, Pullen was the one who actually installed the original on 30 August 1853 (Pullen 1855: 786). He was still present at Beechey Island for Morgan's burial service, performed by Robert McClure, on 24 May 1854 (Pullen 1855: 804).

Short of an actual exhumation of the eastern and westernmost gravesites, which this author is not recommending, and in the absence of any contradictory evidence beyond the current placement of the Morgan headboard, the Pullen map is the definitive evidence for the placement of the Bellot and Morgan headboards,

Along with the placement of the Morgan headboard, another question was discussed by Hobson 1993. He presents the illustration from the *Pandora* expedition (*The Illustrated London News* 1875) and, because the headboard to the east is shown significantly out of line with the three Franklin graves, believes there may be a sixth headboard/grave to consider. Another image to give pause, from a different perspective, is in Kane (1854:

opposite 162), reprinted by Beattie and Geiger (1988: 24), and by Savours (1999: 208), which illustrates *four* apparent headboards from the 1850–1851 period.

Most of the uncertainty described by Hobson concerns the accuracy of *The Illustrated London News* engraving(s). It is neither clear which headboards are whose, nor what in the image are graves or extra rocks and mounds. Powell notes with some justification that ‘... engravings are too dependent on the accuracy of the engravers and the quality of the sketches, often drawn under difficult conditions...’ (Powell 2006: 330). Crucial evidence is an actual photograph taken at the site and published a year later in Young’s account of the voyage (Young 1876: opposite 42). It is of somewhat marginal quality but, on careful examination, five headboards and numerous larger and mounds of rocks can be distinguished and compared with *The Illustrated London News* illustration and relative positions at the current site. It is not obvious the photograph in the 1876 book is from the same perspective and therefore was the basis used by *The Illustrated London News* engraver, but it is argued that the differences are less than first appear and that it might possibly be the source. First, the current headboard positions, roughly placed in a line, cannot be directly compared with the old images. Torrington’s in particular in 1875 was immediately in front of the rocks of the grave and is now ~3 meters (9’) in front (south). It appears in Hobson’s 1974 picture that Torrington’s headboard was in the current position, implying it had been relocated sometime in the prior century. A second point is that the eastern (unmarked) grave is nearly the same distance out of line (south) of the other four. The consequence is that in the 1875 photograph, Torrington’s headboard appears well behind the eastern grave. What appears to be an out of position easternmost, and, therefore, a sixth, grave in *The Illustrated London News* engraving might only be a slightly more exaggerated positioning of Torrington’s relative to the eastern grave.

Also worth asking is whether there is any evidence of anyone else who might have been buried or at least memorialised here? For the period 1850–1851, in addition to Kane and Osborn, the most accessible summaries are edited dispatches by Captains Penny and Austin in *The Illustrated London News* for 20 September and 4 October 1851 (*The Illustrated London News* 1851a: 347, 1851b: 409–10). The death of George S. Malcolm is the only one noted, and it is specifically stated he was buried on the northeast shore of Griffin Island. For the period 1852–1853, we have Pullen’s extensive reports (Pullen 1855: 733–814). No additional evidence was found.

Kane’s written description of Beechey Island sites (Kane 1854: 162–165) indicates that the fourth object in his published engraving was probably intended to be the wooden anvil block found close to the graves. This is supported by an illustration of the actual block, similar in outline and dimensions to the Kane illustration and description, in *The Illustrated London News* (1851b: 409).



Fig. 4. ‘Franklin House’ or ‘Storehouse.’

In conclusion, there is sufficient documentation to justify repositioning the Beechey Island headboards, only Torrington’s being currently at the correct grave, and adding a reconstructed Bellot headboard per M’Dougall’s inscription to the western grave mound to reflect accurately and appropriately the Franklin gravesite memorials as left in 1854.

Other Franklin sites

Kane (1854: 155–169), Osborn (1865: 87–91), Sutherland (1852: 303–306), and De Bray (1992: 43) describe the early appearance of most of the other Franklin sites as seen on the Pullen map. There are also sites to the south of the graves as seen on the Osborn map (Fig. 3). The sites to the north of the graves were all excavated during the Franklin Search, sometimes more than once, looking for any messages or additional insights into the missing explorers. They would have been excavated down to the permafrost (10 cm according to Bettie and Geiger (1988: 95)). What is left now are craters that have a flat floor, probably representing the maximum possible size of the original sites, with a surrounding rim of grey gravel. These craters are not obvious from a distance, but quite apparent up close. From the graves first going northeast (following Pullen) and then on the south side (mostly following Osborn), the sites and tentative identifications are as follows.

- 1) ‘Franklin’s House’ according to Pullen, the ‘Storehouse’ according to Osborn (Fig. 4). Osborn describes this as including the shavings of a carpentry shop (Osborn 1865: 87–88). This is probably the ‘central shore establishment’ of Kane, although he puts the carpentry shop separate and southeast of the armourer’s site next to the graves. This site is also pictured in an aerial view in Phillips (Phillips 1985: 153, Fig. 3).
- 2) ‘Observatory’ according to Kane, Pullen’s second triangle just east of ‘Franklin’s House’ (Fig. 5). Kane describes his ‘central shore establishment’ as a series of mounds with the first ‘...inclosed one nearly elliptical area, and one other, which, though separated from the first by a lesser mound,



Fig. 5. 'Observatory' (?) foreground with 'Franklin House' in background.



Fig. 7. 'Tent' site.

appeared to be connected with it.' (Kane 1854: 164).

- 3) 'Supposed Garden' according to Pullen at the crest of the northern beach cliff (Fig. 6). This location is also consistent with Osborn's description of it being 'On the eastern slope of the ridge of Beechey Island. . . A few hundred yards lower down, a mound, the foundation of a storehouse [that is 1) above], was next to be seen.' (Osborn 1865: 87). Kane comments on this. 'The little garden, too: I did not see it; but Lieutenant Osborn describes it . . .' He also notes that the garden is 'a few hundred yards lower down' from the central shore establishment, but anything lower or easterly by this distance would be into the bay and southerly would be past the graves. His description fits if he actually intended to write 'higher' or northerly or simply misheard the relative positions of the 'Franklin's House' relative to the Garden from Osborn (Kane 1854: 167, 166). De Bray shows the 'jardin' being close to the bay, but he shows a 'cairn' (label unclear), presumably the Franklin can cairn, too far down (southwest or south) on the Union bay ridge that therefore allows enough space to place



Fig. 6. 'Supposed Garden' site. Line of gravel in middle at edge of cliff, just in front and to right of darkest horizontal band.

the 'jardin' between it and Erebus and Terror Bay (De Bray 1992: 42). The actual distances on the ground make one of the two relative positions on De Bray's map nearly impossible. This map also uses an oval cross-hatched symbol for the garden that is the same and in a similar location as on the 20 September 1851 issue of *The Illustrated London News* map (*The Illustrated London News* 1851a: 348), suggesting that De Bray might have used the earlier document in part for his sketch.

- 4) 'Tent' according to Pullen with two triangles, although only one crater was observed by the author (Fig. 7). There is an immediately adjacent dark patch as seen in the photograph that might be what Pullen intended. This tent site is also a little closer to the Erebus and Terror Bay beach than it appears on the Pullen map. This site is not identified with any described in the narratives, though it is approximately where De Bray shows the garden.
- 5) 'Franklin can cairn' (author's nomenclature), Franklin's cairn according to Pullen (Figs. 2, 8, 9). Kane indicates that there were '... more than six hundred preserved-meat cans, arranged in regular order. They had been emptied, and were now filled with limestone pebbles, perhaps to serve as convenient ballast on boating expeditions.' (Kane 1854: 164–165). On Pullen's



Fig. 8. Franklin can cairn.



Fig. 9. Franklin can cairn.

and on other maps of the Franklin search, this is commonly designated the same as 'Franklin's cairn' on the south side of the summit of the island. In support of Powell's plea for consistent nomenclature, 'Franklin can cairn' is proposed here to distinguish this site from the one on the summit.

- 6) 'Armourer's forge' close to graves according to Kane and Osborn. This would include the anvil block in Kane's illustration discussed above.
- 7) 'Washing-place' adjacent to small stream according to Osborn's map number 5 (Osborn 1865: 298) (Fig. 3) and De Bray (1992: 42). It appears that De Bray marks this and the forge (6) together. This area is described by Kane as having some washing tubs sawn from beef barrels, and might be what he thought was a carpentry shop. *The Illustrated London News* (1851a) map (see following item) shows one location near graves as 'WASH? & FORGE'. Phillips indicates there were visible traces of this site during surveys conducted in the high Arctic between 1976–1982 (Phillips 1985: 151).
- 8) 'Post' according to *The Illustrated London News* map (1851a: 348) and De Bray (1992: 42), in which one of a pair of directional signs was found lying on the ground. One sign, with a finger presumably pointing toward the ships, is shown in *The Illustrated London News* (1851b: 409), and is preserved at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich as recorded in the listing of Franklin relics as item AAA2026 in Savours (1999: 329). The original anvil block noted above, on the other hand, is not explicitly included in the listing.
- 9) 'Washing-place 2' or explicitly 'WASH &c' as recorded in *The Illustrated London News* (1851a). Osborn's description implies that there were scattered relics in this area (Osborn 1865: 88).
- 10) 'Shooting-station' according to Osborn at or just southwest of the Northumberland House location

(Fig. 3). De Bray has something in this area but the legend is not clear (De Bray 1992: 42).

Nothing of Pullen's 'Resolute cairn' was spotted by the author from the cliff above. The beach is not very wide, and in some years the sea ice must be pushed all the way up to the base of the cliff destroying anything in this area. Not on the map nor described in the accounts is another artificial appearing mound of gravel closer to the spit at the termination of the ridge just a little northeast of the Franklin can cairn. The sites south of the graves (6 to 10 above) were not noticed in 2008, and the accounts imply they were more superficial surface remains rather than the actual constructions to the north.

The location of the 'Supposed Garden' at the edge of the north-facing cliff was curious to this observer. Any northerly wind has an abrupt updraft here, a feature taken advantage of by birds gliding over the beach, and pours over the top. In a terrain where shelter is hard to come by, the garden seems to have been placed in the windiest location possible. The contrary evidence of *The Illustrated London News* and De Bray placing the location closer to the Erebus and Terror Bay, and hence more sheltered, is discussed in 3) above.

The Franklin can cairn was second only to the graves in level of interest of the Franklin sites (Fig. 2, the foreshortening in this perspective considerably exaggerates the size of the cans). The tin cans left by Franklin's expedition have been much discussed during and since the Franklin search because of the possibility of faulty workmanship and more recently of lead poisoning from the solder contributing to the disaster (especially Beattie and Geiger 1988: 112–3, 156–9; Keenleyside and others 1997). Regarding the original tin cans, the most extensive and careful study is by Cyriax (1997: 108–118). He determined that Franklin was supplied with cans ranging from 8lb to 11lb (3.6 kg to 0.5 kg), with nearly 70% of the 7,961 total cans being the 4lb (1.8 kg) size, and another 10% of the 2lb (0.9 kg) size. A picture of a real can, recovered by Schwatka on King William Island in 1879, and another picture of the Franklin can cairn site in 1984–1986 by Roger Amy and Owen Beattie are in Delgado (1999: 167). Also Phillips (1985: 154, Fig. 5) has an earlier photograph from approximately 1976–1982. From outside the crater, only a general impression can be given of the 2008 remnants. They are quite fragmentary and clearly nothing like the original number was left in place. Most of the larger pieces, in place in 1984–1986 when Beattie and others were at the site, are now gone (Fig. 9 can be compared with Delgado 1999: 167). The patina matches that of the metal bands from casks at the Northumberland House, while the latter, being much heavier metal, are correspondingly much more intact. As can be seen in the photograph, some rims are still complete and appear to be ~80–100 mm (3–4") in diameter. Another obvious feature is the unusual growth of moss and lichen due to the mineralisation of the ground, and which supports the presumption the *in situ* fragments are not modern.

Further afield, it is also worth noting is that Osborn, *The Illustrated London News* and others, describe Franklin sites at Cape Riley and towards Caswell's Tower in Maxwell Bay. The possible Franklin tent rings at Cape Riley, as observed in 1977, are described by Phillips and others. They also describe and present photographs of the status of the Northumberland House as well as other Franklin search site around the high Arctic (Phillips-Parmenter and others 1978). Hett (1985) gives an overview on issues and problems of conservation of these sites and associated artefacts.

To summarise, in addition to the gravesite memorials, physical remnants are still seen on Beechey Island locating some of the Franklin sites from the expedition's 1845–1846 over winter activities. These enable one to follow on the ground the initial discoveries described in the Franklin search literature.

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