

Notes

The date of birth of Captain F.R.M. Crozier R.N.

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ABSTRACT. The generally accepted date of birth of F.R.M. Crozier is 17 September 1796. On the basis of a fresh scrutiny of the evidence, it is suggested that 16 August 1796 is more probable.

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Crozier's birth date

The monuments erected to Captain F.R.M. Crozier in his hometown of Banbridge, Co. Down in Northern Ireland, in the 1860s, state that he was born in 'September, 1796'. Fluhmann (1976: 5) deduced that the 17th of that month was his date of birth. This she did on the basis of evidence

in an undated memorandum from Crozier held in the archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute (Crozier no date). This was written during the great Antarctic expedition of 1839–1843 commanded by James Clark Ross in HMS *Erebus*, with Ross himself on board, and with HMS *Terror* commanded by Crozier. She states that the text is 'almost obliterated'. The addressee of the memorandum was, according to Fluhmann, Lieut. Sibbald, of HMS *Erebus*, apparently because he was the only officer on board that vessel with John as a first name. According to her, it reads: 'Dear John: I send for . . . and a p . . . d of pork for my birthday (17th)' (Fluhmann 1976: 5). The memorandum in question came to the Institute in the Lefroy bequest of Franklin papers in 1941. This date, 17th, with the month of September 1796, has been generally accepted as his date of birth.

However there are grounds for doubting whether this is correct. In the journal of Sergeant W.K. Cunningham, Sergeant of the Royal Marines in HMS *Terror* 1839–1843, the following appears for August 1842: '16th Tuesday Blowing fresh all day. The Captains birth day: all the Officers of both Ships dined with him and Spent the evening. Spliced "main brace"' (Cunningham 1839–1843). The ships were then at Port Louis in the Falkland Islands.

As a result, a photocopy of the original memo that Fluhmann had used was secured (Fig. 1). It is actually

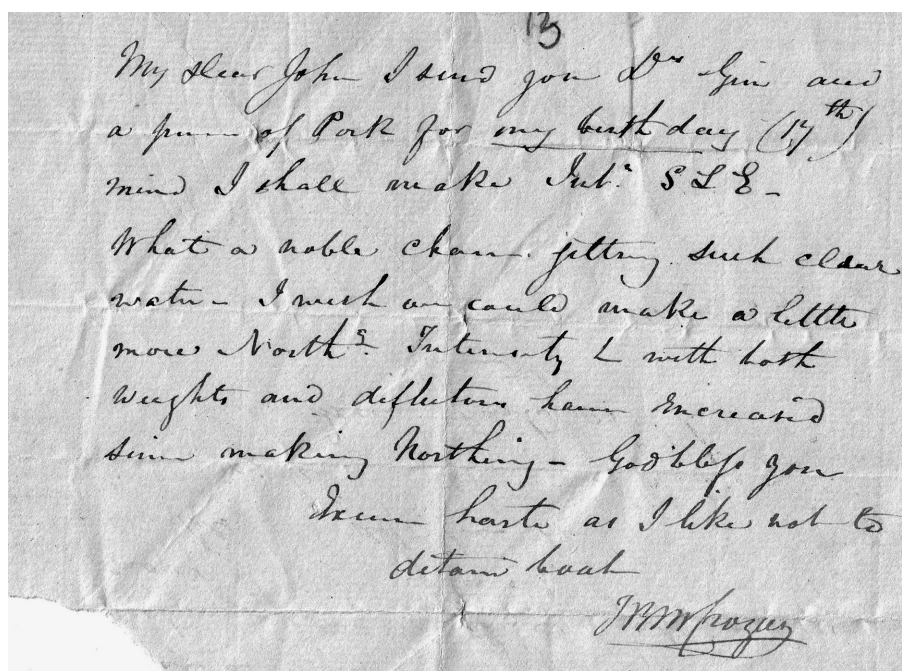


Fig. 1. Crozier's memorandum to J.C. Ross, 14 August 1843(?).

in rather better condition than she implied, although not every word is legible. It is addressed, on the verso, 'Captain Ross, Erebus', and reads:

My Dear John I send you D² Gin and a piece of Pork for my birthday (17th) mind I shall make Int² S L [this might be &] E -

'What a noble chance getting such clear water - I wish we could make a little more North^s. Intensity \angle [this appears to be an abbreviation for angle] with both weights and deflectors have increased since making Northing - God Bless You.

Excuse haste as I like not to detain boat.

[signed] FRMCrozier.

From this it can be seen that the ships were at sea in company and that a boat passed between them that did not have either Captain on board. It is not clear what the sentence immediately following (17th) signifies. It starts on a new line with a lower case letter but would appear to be part of the first sentence, and possibly something to do with accounting for the items transferred. For example 'mind I shall make Internal Supply Ledger Expenditure'. If it is a new sentence then Int² could be an abbreviation for Intensity and the meaning would be that observations needed to be made on 'S & E' headings to help eliminate the ship's magnetism. The reference to 'Intensity' angle is to an observation of the intensity of the earth's magnetic field that was measured, daily, in both ships at sea using 'Mr Fox's' apparatus. This consisted of a dipping-needle and graduated circle. The intensity of the magnetic field could be measured either by attaching weights to the axis on which the needle turned, or by using deflecting magnets. The amount of deflection was proportional to the intensity of the field. In general, intensity increases away from the terrestrial magnetic equator, so that to 'have increased since making Northing' would imply the ships were in the northern hemisphere. However, the reference to 'clear water' might imply that the ships were in southern Antarctic waters where ice was a problem.

This leads naturally to a discussion of the year in which this memorandum was written. In 1839 the ships did not sail from England until 25 September. On 28 July 1840, the ships were separated in a storm on passage from Kerguelen. On 15 August, *Terror* entered Hobart to be joined by *Erebus* a couple of days later, departing for the south on 12 November. On 5 August 1841, the ships sailed from Sydney, passing round North Island of New Zealand to arrive at the Bay of Islands on 18 August where they remained until 23 November before proceeding south. In 1842, in August the ships were in Port Louis, Falkland Islands (on 28 August Lieut. Sibbald joined *Terror* from *Erebus*), on 8 September they sailed and arrived at Hermite Island near Cape Horn. In 1843, on August '14th Monday Very Fine. Light & Variable winds. Making little or No progress. Boat from the Erebus came onboard in the evening.' On 16 August, 'Fine Light & Variable winds & occasionally Calm. Captain & some of the Officers dined onboard the Erebus.' (Cunningham

1839–1843). The ships were then near the Azores and arrived home on 4 September.

From this it would appear that the only opportunity for the note to have been sent was on 14 August 1843, and that Crozier was sending some provisions over for the dinner party that was held on 16 August, his birthday according to Cunningham. The discrepancy in the dates, 16 August according to Cunningham, and 17 of an unstated month, according to the memorandum, might possibly have been a private joke since the ships had crossed the International Date Line and celebrated 25 November twice in 1841. It is, perhaps, more likely that '(17th)' has nothing to do with the date. Ross and Crozier had first served together in *Fury* in 1821 and had been firm friends ever since, so Ross was almost certainly well aware of the date of Crozier's birthday. It might refer to the 17th time they had spent it together.

The reference to 'clear water' might mean that in the south they had had difficulty with the magnetic apparatus as it vibrated every time the ship struck an ice floe, making it difficult to obtain accurate results, which, of course would not be the case off the Azores.

It can only be assumed that 'My Dear John' was a mistake on Crozier's part which he missed in his haste to get the note away.

It is difficult to believe the memorials in Banbridge are wrong. They are both by the same sculptor, and since neither gives a date it is not impossible that the actual date of his birth had been forgotten. If it was remembered that he was about a year old when he was baptized, that just might be why September was selected, since he was baptized on 21 September 1797. A copy of his baptismal certificate, signed by the Presbyterian Minister of Banbridge is with the papers for his examination for Lieutenant (The National Archives). However, from the above analysis it appears that the most likely date for Crozier's birth is 16 August 1796.

Acknowledgements

Extracts from Sergeant Cunningham's journal reproduced by permission of the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland and Mrs. J. Herwegh-Hellwitz, the note by Crozier by permission of the Scott Polar Research Institute.

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