

CHRISTIE'S

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RARE ARCTIC MEDAL FROM FRANKLIN'S FATAL EXPEDITION - AWARDED TO LIEUTENANT JOHN IRVING - TO BE OFFERED AT CHRISTIE'S IN OCTOBER



[Lieutenant John Irving, RN, (1815-c.1848)] – Franklin's Northwest Passage Expedition, 1845,

John Irving's Arctic Medal and silver clasp

Victoria Regina, incused 'LT. JOHN IRVING R.N. H.M.S. TERROR 1848.' on the rim, the octagonal silver clasp engraved 'Decorum est pro Patria mori / LIEUT. / JOHN IRVING, R.N. / H.M.S. TERROR. / 1845 - 1848. / "Who shall separate us from the / love of Christ / Shall tribulation or distress / - or famine?" / Romans VIII. 35.'

Estimate: £20,000-£30,000

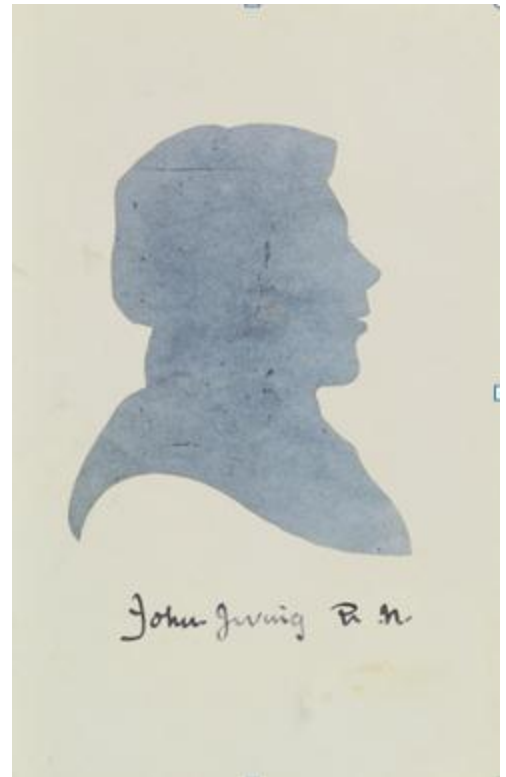
South Kensington, London - Christie's is pleased to announce the sale of the Arctic Medal awarded posthumously to Franklin's Third Officer on *HMS Terror*, John Irving, RN (estimate: £20,000-£30,000) in Christie's *Travel, Science and Natural History* sale, 8 October 2014. Consigned for sale by Irving's descendant, the medal serves as poignant souvenir recalling Franklin's ill-fated expedition. The appearance of this rare Arctic Medal for auction coincides with the announcement by the Canadian Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, that one of Franklin's fabled ships has been found in the Arctic.

“Whatever happens it is the will of God. I hope you do not think me so weak as to labour under any presentiment of evil; but remember this is no common voyage ... Two years is a long time without any tidings, and perhaps we may be three years at least. Do not give up on us if you hear nothing.”

John Irving to his sister, Woolwich, 18 April 1845

The Arctic Medal was granted by the Queen in 1857 ‘to all Persons, of every rank and class, who have been engaged in the several Expeditions to the Arctic Regions, whether of discovery or search, between the years 1818 and 1855...’ (The London Gazette, 5 May 1857). The present medal was awarded posthumously to Irving, the first identifiable victim of the most dreadful and famous of all Arctic expeditions.

John Irving was Third Officer on *HMS Terror* on Sir John Franklin’s ill-fated Northwest Passage Expedition of 1845-48. A Scot, born in Edinburgh, the son of a lawyer and close friend of Sir Walter Scott, he joined the navy at 15 and soon became an evangelical Christian. Disillusioned, he left the navy in 1836 to emigrate to run a sheep station in Australia, an unsuccessful and short-lived enterprise, he was back in Scotland, and in the navy again, in 1843. After a brief period at Portsmouth in *HMS Excellent*, he was selected for Arctic service and joined Captain Crozier’s *HMS Terror*.



Franklin’s expedition sailed for the Arctic in May 1845. His ships the *Erebus* and *Terror* were seen for the very last time by a whaler awaiting an opportunity to get into Lancaster Sound in July. Records found subsequently show the expedition overwintered in Beechey Island, sailed west in the summer but were beset by ice north of King William Island in September, and drifted in the ice near Victory Point through their second winter of 1846-47. After Franklin’s death in June, 20 officers and men died from food poisoning and starvation through the second winter, and the ships were abandoned the following spring, 105 men setting out with their boats on a 250 mile march south to the mainland. All the men were lost on the march, the last reaching Montreal Island. Forty search expeditions were sent out in search of the lost expedition over the following 30 years.

John Irving’s grave was discovered at a place now known as Camp Crozier by Lieutenant Frederick Schwatka’s American search expedition in June 1879, the remains identifiable by the presence of a silver medal, engraved ‘*Second Mathematical Prize, Royal Naval College. Awarded to John Irving Mid-summer. 1830*’, lying nearby. Schwatka and his party gathered Irving’s bones (unique amongst the skeletal remains of Crozier’s men during the last 150 years, in being positively identifiable), for reburial in Scotland and built a cairn on the spot. On 7 January 1881, some 33 years after his death at the age of 33, John Irving was accorded an elaborate public funeral and was reinterred in Dean Cemetery, Edinburgh.

From the arrival of the last letter from Upernavik, dated 10 July 1845, until the discovery of his skeleton in 1879, Irving's fate had remained unknown. "By the location of the grave and other indications, it has been conjectured that in 1848 he bravely led a return group back to where the ships had been abandoned, possibly to fetch supplies that had been left at 'Crozier's Camp'. Having reached the camp, Irving succumbed, the cause of death almost certainly being starvation induced by the advanced stages of scurvy. ... Some of his men were still fit enough to wrap the body in canvas, in the style of a burial at sea, as described when found by Schwatka's party. So far as their remaining strength and the permafrost would allow, they were able to dig a shallow grave. A simple Christian burial service was certainly performed, and the medal was interred with the body." (R. Lloyd-Jones, 'An evangelical Christian on Franklin's last expedition; Lieutenant John Irving of HMS Terror', *Polar Record*, 33 (187), 1997, pp. 327-31).

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PUBLIC EXHIBITION:

Saturday, 4 October: 11am – 5pm

Sunday, 5 October: 11am - 5pm

Monday, 6 October: 9am - 7:30pm

Tuesday, 7 October: 9am - 5pm

AUCTION:

Travel, Science and Natural History

South Kensington

Wednesday, 8 October 2014

10:30 am

About Christie's

Christie's, the world's leading art business, had global auction and private sales in 2013 that totaled £4.5 billion/ \$7.1 billion, making it the highest annual total in Christie's history. Christie's is a name and place that speaks of extraordinary art, unparalleled service and expertise, as well as international glamour. Founded in 1766 by James Christie, Christie's has since conducted the greatest and most celebrated auctions through the centuries providing a popular showcase for the unique and the beautiful. Christie's offers around 450 auctions annually in over 80 categories, including all areas of fine and decorative arts, jewellery, photographs, collectibles, wine, and more. Prices range from \$200 to over \$100 million. Christie's also has a long and successful history conducting private sales for its clients in all categories, with emphasis on Post-War & Contemporary, Impressionist & Modern, Old Masters and Jewellery. Private sales totaled £760.5 million (\$1.19 billion) in 2013, an increase of 20% on the previous year.

Christie's has a global presence with 53 offices in 32 countries and 12 salerooms around the world including in London, New York, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Amsterdam, Dubai, Zürich, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Mumbai. More recently, Christie's has led the market with expanded initiatives in growth markets such as Russia, China, India and the United Arab Emirates, with successful sales and exhibitions in Beijing, Mumbai and Dubai.

**Estimates do not include buyer's premium. Sales totals are hammer price plus buyer's premium and do not reflect costs, financing fees or application of buyer's or seller's credits*