

## **The Painting of the Arctic Explorer Captain William Edward Parry (1790-1855) at Crosthwaite, near Kendal**

ROB DAVID

### **Summary**

**T**HIS article discusses the provenance of a picture of the early nineteenth century polar explorer, William Parry, found at Crosthwaite. It has been possible through the use of local sources, polar literature and art historical material to identify the probable artist, and to demonstrate that this painting was a copy of an engraving of Parry that was published in *The European Magazine* and *London Review*, and which was based on a portrait by Samuel Drummond. It is suggested that the new picture was probably created between 1821 and 1823, and the fact that it was painted in a small provincial community reflects the reach of the early nineteenth century media and the significance of the search for the North West Passage for the country at large.

In 1954 a painting of the Arctic explorer, William Edward Parry, was discovered under layers of wallpaper and paint at Tower Hill, Crosthwaite (Fig. 1). The discovery was extensively reported in the local press.<sup>1</sup> It was depicted in the *Westmorland Gazette*, and the accompanying article speculated as to why such a portrait had been painted in Crosthwaite and who might have painted it. The paper concluded by suggesting that as there was no evidence that Parry had ever lived in the village, 'it may be that some member of his [Parry's] expeditions retired to the house and it is possible that the wood on which the portrait is painted once formed part of a sea chest'. The following week a second article appeared which referred to a communication from Mr J. B. Hoare of Meole Brace Hall, Shropshire,<sup>2</sup> who, having seen the photograph of the painting the previous week, said that he had a portrait in his possession similar to the Crosthwaite portrait, and that so far as he knew 'Sir William paid only one visit to the Lakes in 1852, and he was apparently there only a few weeks'. It was not until the publication of *Cameos of Crosthwaite and Lyth: The Damson Valley*<sup>3</sup> in 2002, which included a photograph of the painting, that the mural has once again been brought to the attention of a wider audience. Further research now makes it possible to identify the artist responsible, speculate with some confidence on the source for the painting and suggest a date for it.

### **Who was the artist?**

The painting is situated on a bulkhead overlooking the staircase at Tower Hill. It has been painted onto three vertical wooden panels which form both the bulkhead and the back of a built-in bedroom cupboard. The panels, which measure 760mm by 1520mm, fit perfectly into the available space and there is no reason to think that



FIG. 1. The painting of Captain William Edward Parry at Tower Hill, Crosthwaite.

the portrait was not painted *in situ*. The fact that the inscription is central to the portrait certainly suggests that. However, the portrait omits Parry's lower left arm and hand which might suggest that there had originally been a fourth panel, but recent renovations have proved that this was not the case.<sup>4</sup> The overall size of the picture, as well as the orientation of the panels, indicate that the wooden planks had not had an earlier use as part of a seaman's chest.<sup>5</sup>

At the time of Parry's Arctic voyages (1818-1827) Tower Hill was occupied by Richard Cartmell. His obituary, which was printed in the both *The Westmorland Advertiser and Kendal Chronicle* and in the *Westmorland Gazette* on 2 April 1831, indicates that Cartmell was likely to have been the artist:

On the 20 ult. at Crosthwaite Green near Kendal of a protracted illness. Mr Richard Cartmell aged 59. He was a very ingenious man, whose talents have been confined to his own immediate neighbourhood. As an artist he excelled, being self taught, and has left behind him a number of portraits sketched from memory after having seen the person, amongst whom are Lord and Col. Lowther, Lord Brougham, the late Sir Daniel le Fleming and the Revd J. Strickland, with many others in general good likeness. He had also acquired the knowledge of clock and watch machinery, although by trade a cabinet maker, which he followed for amusement. He has left a widow with three sons and three daughters to lament the loss of an affectionate parent.<sup>6</sup>

The artistic quality of the Parry portrait points to the artist being 'self taught'. It would seem that Cartmell may also have used his ingenuity to embellish his house. Tower Hill is sometimes called The Clock House because of the clock face embedded in one of its outer walls. Although the clock face has recently been reset into the external wall, and the original mechanism has long since gone, it is possible that Cartmell made the original.<sup>7</sup> As well as the Parry painting, there were at least two other murals in the house, one of a young boy and another of an angel-like figure.<sup>8</sup>

Richard Cartmell was the son of John Cartmell of Broad Oak in Town End Quarter, Crosthwaite, and was baptized along with his twin brother Turner, at Crosthwaite-cum-Lyth on 11 August 1771.<sup>9</sup> On 1 November 1810 at the age of 29, he married Elizabeth Workman, who also lived in Crosthwaite.<sup>10</sup> An 1829 trade directory refers to him as a yeoman and farmer of Crosthwaite Green, suggesting that despite his other skills his main source of income was from farming.<sup>11</sup>

In 1829 Crosthwaite was part of Heversham parish, and the trade directory does not list any artists in any of the townships of the parish. However, two artists are listed as living in Kendal, the adjacent market centre.<sup>12</sup> One was Richard Stirzaker, a more accomplished artist than the creator of the Parry portrait, who favoured architectural and crowd scenes.<sup>13</sup> The other was George Holdon Johnson, about whom nothing is known. So there are no obvious competitors to Cartmell as the painter of the Parry portrait.

### **What was the source for the Crosthwaite picture?**

How did Richard Cartmell know what Parry looked like? As there is no reason why Parry should have visited Crosthwaite and met Cartmell, the link between the two

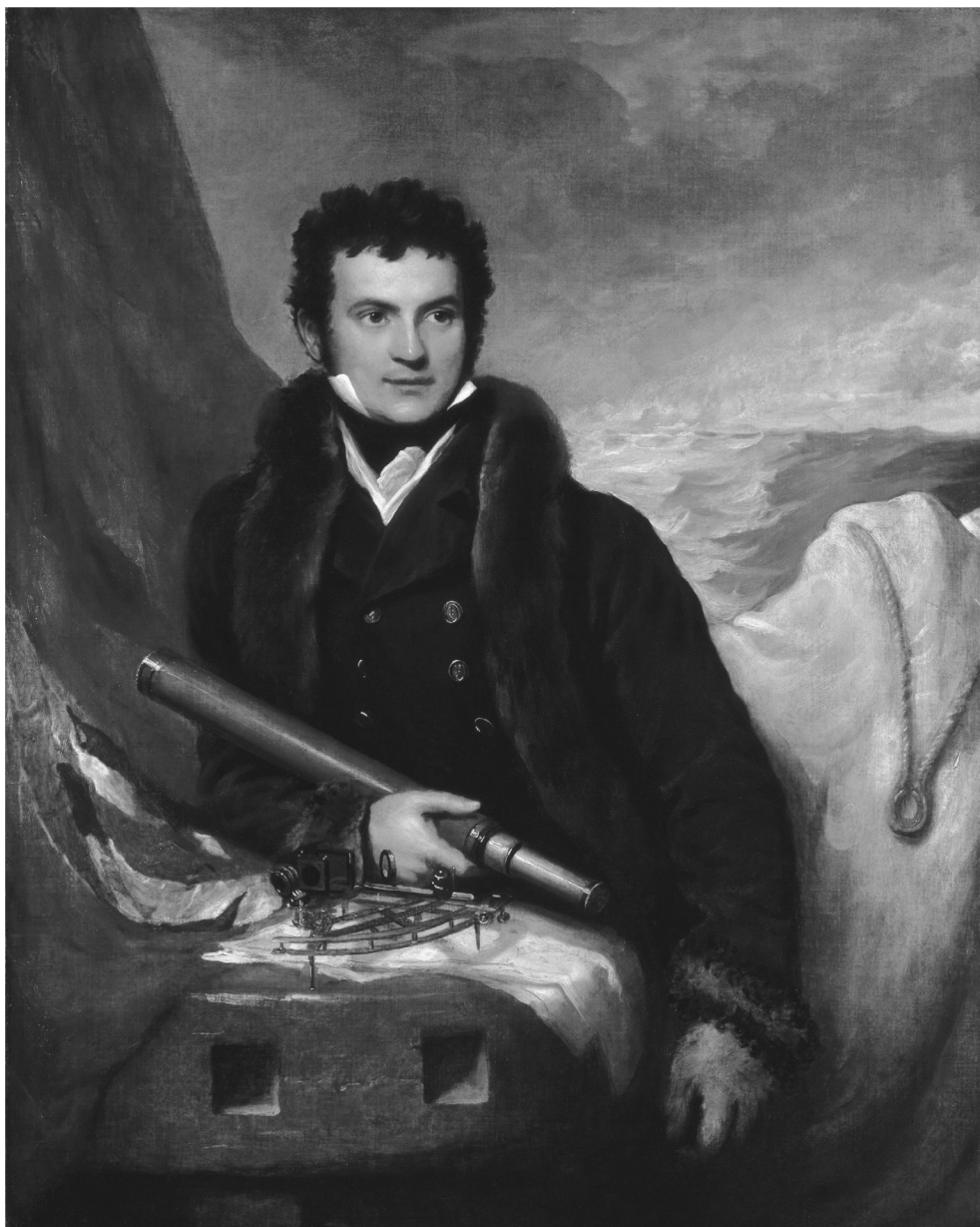


FIG. 2. Portrait of William Edward Parry, 1820 painted by Samuel Drummond.  
(National Portrait Gallery, London)

men must have been more indirect. One possibility is that Cartmell had met Parry elsewhere, and given his ability 'to sketch from memory', subsequently painted the picture on the panels at Tower Hill. However, this is unlikely as Parry only spent short periods in Britain between the beginning of his involvement in polar exploration in 1818 and Cartmell's death in 1831. Even when he was in England his work kept him in London and at the ports where his expedition ships were fitted out, although he did have some connections with the north of the country. His mother was the daughter of John Rigby of Lancaster, so there may have been reasons to come north to visit her family.<sup>14</sup> His marriage to Isabella Louisa, fourth daughter of Sir John Stanley (later the first Baron Stanley) of Alderley Park in Cheshire and Penrhos in North Wales in 1827, did lead to visits to her family homes, but there is no evidence that he came further north at that time, and his first visit to the Lake District was not until 1852.<sup>15</sup> It seems more likely that Cartmell based his painting on a picture of Parry.

The earliest painting of Parry, of which there are two copies, is that by Sir William Beechey in 1819, and there is evidence that Parry was sitting for this portrait while he was preparing for the 1819-20 expedition in search of the North West Passage.<sup>16</sup> This portrait shows Parry reading the letter of appointment to that expedition, and bears no resemblance to the Crosthwaite portrait. Neither was it well known, as it does not seem to have been engraved, so it is very unlikely that Cartmell had access to it. This portrait can therefore be ruled out as Cartmell's source.

In 1820 Samuel Drummond, a largely self-taught London artist, painted another portrait of Parry. Drummond was a prolific portraitist and a marine and history painter, who was able to 'produce a portrait in a single sitting lasting an hour and a half, and charged eight guineas for a three quarter length'.<sup>17</sup> His ability to work at speed was no doubt helpful to a busy man like Parry. There are two versions of this picture. One has remained with the Parry family, while the other was originally owned by John Barrow (1808-98), the son of Sir John Barrow, the Second Secretary of the Admiralty and supporter of all of Parry's Arctic expeditions. He gave it to the United Services Institute in 1850,<sup>18</sup> from where it was purchased by the National Portrait Gallery in 1975 (Fig. 2). The similarities between the Crosthwaite painting and the Drummond portraits might suggest that this was the source, but would Cartmell have had the opportunity to see either of them? One copy was exhibited at the Royal Academy in London in 1821, but there is no evidence that Cartmell visited that exhibition. The version owned by John Barrow might possibly have been seen by Cartmell, given that the Barrow family had connections with Ulverston, only a few miles from Crosthwaite. However, after John's father, Sir John Barrow, left Ulverston as a young man, neither he nor his family seem to have maintained any significant links with the town and there is no reason why the portrait would ever have been hung in Cumbria. As the other copy has always been in the possession of the Parry family, it is unlikely therefore that Cartmell would have seen either of these original portraits.

It is much more likely that Cartmell saw one of the engravings based on Drummond's picture. Several engravings were created, such as those published by Limbird, Jaques and Wright in the years after 1820,<sup>19</sup> but the one most likely to have been



FIG. 3. Engraving of Captain William Edward Parry, by J. Thomson, 1 March 1821, for *The European Magazine and London Review*.

the prototype for the Crosthwaite painting was published in *The European Magazine and London Review* (Fig. 3).<sup>20</sup> It is known that Drummond ‘supported his family by doing portraits for the publisher Asperne’ for this journal.<sup>21</sup> The engraver was J. Thomson who engraved many of the illustrations for *The European Magazine*. His engraving is a reasonably faithful reproduction of Drummond’s portrait except that Parry’s lower left arm and left hand were omitted, as on the Crosthwaite picture. Most significantly Thomson incorporated a title beneath the portrait which, except for the inclusion of dates in the last line, is identical to that on the Crosthwaite painting:

Captn. W. E. Parry R N  
Commander of the Polar Expedition  
(1819-20)

Although the engraving is dated 1 March 1821, it was published in the February 1821 edition of *The European Magazine*, before Parry was promoted Captain. At that time Parry’s rank was Commander, rather than Captain, but the distinction was often overlooked and the term ‘Captain’ used. This seems to have been the case on this occasion.

There were other portraits painted of Parry before he left for a post in Australia in 1829. T. Phillips painted a portrait in 1827, which was exhibited at the Royal Academy in that year.<sup>22</sup> Another portrait, in oils by William Haines, was engraved by Samuel W. Reynolds in 1827.<sup>23</sup> Neither portrait is similar enough to the Crosthwaite picture to be considered as a source. There are other portraits in which Parry holds a telescope including one by Charles Scottowe which was not painted until about 1830, and another undated miniature,<sup>24</sup> but it is unlikely that Cartmell saw either of these as neither appears to have been engraved.

If it is correct that Cartmell based his picture on the engraving in *The European Magazine and London Review*, the question remains as to how he had the opportunity to see the appropriate copy of the journal. It is possible that he may have subscribed to the journal, or that he saw a copy in the house of an acquaintance. Another possibility is that Cartmell saw it at a local Reading Room or through membership of a subscription library, and at least one such library had been operating in New Street, Kendal, since 1794.<sup>25</sup> If the source was Thomson’s engraving, which was printed in monochrome, a second question revolves around Cartmell’s choice of colours in his picture. Cartmell painted Parry using similar colours to those used by Drummond. Given that Parry is in naval uniform, blue was an obvious choice, so the similarity is therefore not surprising. A third question relates to the reasons for his reversal of Parry’s head and coat fastening. These are less easy to explain unless Cartmell was painting from memory or from a rather inadequate sketch. However Cartmell’s omission of Parry’s left arm and hand, as well as the depiction of fur on the right cuff, which is clearer on the engraving than in the original painting, strengthens the probability that Thomson’s engraving was the primary source.<sup>26</sup>

### When and why was the picture painted?

Why Cartmell chose to paint William Edward Parry on the wall of Tower Hill remains a mystery. As we have seen Parry did not have any connections with the area, and Cartmell seems to have had no opportunity to meet Parry or even to have seen any of the portraits of him, except in their engraved versions. If he was in the habit of reading the magazines and journals of the time he would have seen engravings of people in all walks of life, and according to the obituary he seemed to favour painting portraits of people with Cumbrian connections. Cumbrian links with polar exploration were slight. The most recent high profile involvement had been that of Skeffington Lutwidge of Holm Rook, near Seascale, who had been Constantine Phipps's second-in-command and had commanded HMS *Carcass* 'on a Voyage of Discovery towards the North Pole' in 1773, but with little further activity until 1818, Arctic exploration had been neither of national nor Cumbrian significance.<sup>27</sup>

The inscription on the Crosthwaite painting reads:

Captn. W. E. Parry. R N  
Commander of the Polar  
Expedition

Parry's first polar expedition was in 1818 when, as a Lieutenant (the rank he had held since 1810), he was appointed to command the *Alexander* on a voyage to find the North West Passage under the overall command of Captain John Ross. As he was not the overall commander of the expedition, the picture clearly does not relate to the events of that year. As we have seen the use of the word 'Captain' rather than 'Commander' does not necessarily imply that Parry had that rank, and the reference to 'Commander of the Polar Expedition' could refer to any of the expeditions of 1819-20, 1821-23, 1824-25 and 1827. However, the most successful of those expeditions, and the ones most likely to have received enough publicity that people in Crosthwaite could have heard about it, were those of 1819-20 and 1827, so these are likely to have provided the impetus for Cartmell.

In early 1819 Lieutenant Parry was appointed to another expedition charged with discovering the North West Passage, this time as its commander. He had two ships, *Hecla* (on which he sailed) and *Griper*. The expedition sailed in May, passed through Lancaster Sound and reached Melville Island, where the two ships spent the winter. Pack ice in that area during 1820 frustrated his plans. Parry was not able to sail his ships further west, and the expedition returned to London in November. Despite not finding the Passage, Parry had been extremely successful as his ships had travelled over half the distance between Greenland and the Bering Straits and had proved, for the first time, that it was possible to winter in the Arctic. In addition the expedition returned with much valuable geographic and scientific material. On his return Parry was promoted to the rank of Commander; received the freedom of Bath, his native city; was elected to the Royal Society; and along with the ship's company, received the parliamentary grant of £5,000 which had been offered as a reward for those who should first pass the meridian of 110°W within the Arctic Circle. Both Ross and Parry's 1818 voyage and Parry's 1819-20 expedition were widely reported, and best-selling



narrative accounts published.<sup>28</sup> Cartmell could have read one of these in *The European Magazine* January 1821 edition. Thomson's engraving in the following number was accompanied by a eulogy in praise of 'our deserving countryman, Captain Parry, who has on two successive occasions distinguished himself by the display of talents and energies, which have excited the admiration of the country'.<sup>29</sup> Taken together the account, the engraving and the eulogy could have prompted Cartmell to paint a picture of a national hero. Apart from Parry's journeys in the first half of the 1820s, the only other significant British Arctic expedition at that time was that of John Franklin in the Mackenzie district of northern Canada in 1819-22. As the widely read book describing that expedition was not published until 1823, it is more likely that Cartmell's painting was inspired by the 1819-20 expedition and based on Thomson's engraving in the February 1821 edition of *The European Magazine*, and that it was painted sometime after that date and before Franklin's return in late 1822 when it was Parry's name, rather than Franklin's, that would have had most resonance amongst those following British activity in the Arctic.<sup>30</sup>

Although significant, Parry's next two voyages were not so newsworthy. He sailed for the Arctic again in May 1821 with two ships, *Fury* and *Hecla*. On this occasion he sailed to Hudson Strait and Foxe Channel, searching for a passage through Hudson Bay. In November 1821, while he was away, he was promoted to 'Post Captain'. He returned after two and a half years in November 1823. Despite the length of this voyage, there was less publicity on his return as by that time it had become clear that Hudson Bay would not provide the route of the North West Passage, so it is less likely that this voyage would have inspired Cartmell to paint the portrait.

Parry sailed on a fourth voyage in the same two ships in May 1824, this time to Lancaster Sound. On this occasion *Fury* had to be abandoned after she had run aground, but Parry returned to England in 1825 with both crews safely on *Hecla*. His fifth and final Arctic voyage was to Spitsbergen in 1827, from where he hoped to reach the North Pole, but his attempt was frustrated by the ice floes on which he was sledging drifting south almost as fast as he was attempting to travel north, so his crew were expending considerable energy but making very little headway. Despite this he achieved the furthest north (82° 40' 23" N) yet reached, a record that stood until 1876 when it was overtaken by sledging teams from George Nares's expedition.<sup>31</sup> Parry's achievements were celebrated throughout Britain and Europe. Parry arrived back at almost the same moment as John Franklin returned from his hugely successful second journey to the shores of the polar sea, and this resulted in a revival of interest in arctic exploration, as well as knighthoods and university honours for both explorers.<sup>32</sup> Shortly afterwards Parry sailed for Australia to take up the post of commissioner of the Australian Agricultural Company. The publicity surrounding Parry in 1828 and 1829 might have prompted Cartmell to paint the picture, using the old engraving dating back to 1821. However, it is likely that had Cartmell painted the picture after Parry had been knighted, he would probably have referred to the honour in the inscription. Cartmell's death in March 1831 provides a *terminus ante quem*, although the awarding of Parry's knighthood in April 1829 (and the omission of that title from the painting) could provide a possible end-date.

If, however, Cartmell was not the artist, then the painting could have been painted after 1831. The most obvious date would then be 1852. In that year Parry retired from being Captain-Superintendent of Haslar Royal Naval Hospital in Hampshire and came to Keswick for a holiday, 'where he derived much enjoyment from his first acquaintance with the beautiful scenery of the English lakes'. This visit was reported locally and might have provided the impetus for someone to paint the Crosthwaite picture based on a surviving copy of the earlier 1821 engraving.

The Crosthwaite painting is a curiosity. Although it is of little artistic merit, the fact that someone, probably Richard Cartmell, chose to paint a picture of the person who would become Rear-Admiral Sir William Edward Parry on the wall of a Crosthwaite farmhouse, both reflects the significance for the nation of the nineteenth century quest for the North West Passage and is indicative of the increasing reach of the media, written and pictorial. As such the picture's continued survival will be of interest to those concerned with Cumbrian and polar history. It is therefore fortunate that its current owners enjoy the picture as a feature of their stairwell, and are interested in the history of the portrait that they have inherited.

### Acknowledgements

The author is grateful to the Department of History, Lancaster University for the facilities made available to their Honorary Research Fellows. Thanks to John and Caroline Holmes, the owner of Tower Hall, Crosthwaite, for their interest and hospitality; my wife, Sue, for discussions about engravings and print making, and to Desmond Holmes, Ann Savours, and The National Portrait Gallery, London for additional information.

16 Green Road, Kendal, LA9 4QR  
r.david@lancaster.ac.uk

### Notes and References

- <sup>1</sup> *Westmorland Gazette*, 10 April 1954 and 17 April 1954. I am indebted to Desmond Holmes for drawing my attention to this obituary.
- <sup>2</sup> Meole Brace Hall is now a hotel. Parry's second wife was Catherine, widow of Samuel Hoare Jnr of Hampstead. It is not known whether there is a family connection between Mr J. B. Hoare and Samuel Hoare, but if there was, it could explain why a picture of Parry was in the possession of Mr J. B. Hoare in 1954.
- <sup>3</sup> P. Bownass, P. Mutch, H. Trotter, J. Wilson, *Cameos of Crosthwaite and Lyth: The Damson Valley* (Kendal, 2002), 151.
- <sup>4</sup> Information provided by Mr John Holmes.
- <sup>5</sup> The mural is painted so that the three panels run vertically, whereas in a sea chest it is normal, as in an example of an Arctic whaler's chest in Stromness Museum, Orkney, for the panels to run horizontally. The three panels are also considerably larger in size than a normal seaman's chest.
- <sup>6</sup> I am indebted to Desmond Holmes for drawing my attention to this obituary.
- <sup>7</sup> The clock mechanism, located in the room behind the gable, survived until sometime after the Second World War.
- <sup>8</sup> The murals of the young boy and the angel are not visible. Photographs of them can be seen in Bownass, Mutch, Trotter, Wilson, *Cameos of Crosthwaite*, 149-151.
- <sup>9</sup> Crosthwaite-cum-Lyth Baptism Register

- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>11</sup> Parson and White, *Directory of Cumberland and Westmorland* (1829), 630.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 661.
- <sup>13</sup> Kendal Civic Society, *Old Kendal: A Selection of Paintings, Drawings and Prints from the Collection of Kendal Town Council* (Kendal, 2003).
- <sup>14</sup> E. Parry, *Memoirs of Rear-Admiral Sir W. E. Parry, Kt.* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1859).
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 322.
- <sup>16</sup> A. Parry, *Parry of the Arctic* (London, 1963) 46-7. See also [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21443?docPos=11](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21443?docPos=11) (accessed 2/4/08).
- <sup>17</sup> [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8082](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8082) (accessed 4/12/08).
- <sup>18</sup> Since 1975 this picture has been in the collection of the National Portrait Gallery, London (NPG 5053).
- <sup>19</sup> For example J. Limbird, undated, but published c.1825-50 (National Portrait Gallery, NPG D16102). This is similar to Thomson's engraving but Parry is not depicted with the telescope, and it does not include the full text by Thomson, which Cartmell seems to have copied. Jaques and Wright published an engraving of Parry in dress uniform which referred to Parry as 'Commander of the Present and Late Polar Expeditions'. This is not based upon Drummond, but Parry's head faces the same way as in the Crosthwaite painting and could have been a source for the head (Getty Images, 3297026). The engraving published by William Wright in 1831, was based more loosely on Drummond. Like the Crosthwaite portrait Parry's jacket is buttoned in reverse, but in Wright's engraving the telescope is held in the other hand and the fur stole has been omitted.
- <sup>20</sup> *The European Magazine and London Review*, Vol. 79, February 1821, opposite p95.
- <sup>21</sup> [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8082](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8082) (accessed 4/12/08).
- <sup>22</sup> There is an illustration of this portrait in A. Parry, *Parry of the Arctic*, 64
- <sup>23</sup> Dictionary of National Biography (1890 edition), W. E. Parry entry. For the engraving see National Portrait Gallery, NPG D15679.
- <sup>24</sup> E. H. H. Archibald, *Preliminary Descriptive Catalogue of Portraits in Oils* (London, National Maritime Museum, 1961), 108. The miniature is illustrated in A. Savours, 'The North West Passage in the Nineteenth Century: Perils and Pastimes of a Winter in the Ice', *The Hakluyt Society Annual Lecture 2002*, 5 (London, The Hakluyt Society, 2003); and on the cover of A. Parry, *Parry of the Arctic*.
- <sup>25</sup> R. Bingham, *Kendal: A Social History* (Milnthorpe: Cicerone Press, 1995), 414.
- <sup>26</sup> See footnote 19 relating to the possibility that the Jaques and Wright engraving could be the source for the head.
- <sup>27</sup> The words are taken from the memorial to Skeffington Lutwidge erected in Irton church.
- <sup>28</sup> J. Ross, *A voyage of discovery, made under the orders of the Admiralty, in His Majesty's ships Isabella and Alexander, for the purpose of exploring Baffin's Bay, and inquiring into the probability of a Northwest Passage* (London: John Murray, 1819); W.E. Parry, *Journal of a voyage for the discovery of a North-West Passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific; performed in the years 1819-20* (London: John Murray, 1821); A. Fisher, *Journal of a voyage of discovery to the Arctic regions, in His Majesty's ships Hecla and Griper, in the years 1819 & 1820* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, 1821)
- <sup>29</sup> *The European Magazine and London Review*, Vol. 79, January 1821, 45-47; February 1821, 95-102.
- <sup>30</sup> J. Franklin, *Narrative of a journey to the shores of the polar sea, in the years 1819, 20, 21 and 22* (London: John Murray, 1823). If Cartmell also had access to the Jaques and Wright engraving (see footnote 19), its caption indicates that it was made after the 1819-20 expedition and during any one of the subsequent expeditions. However, the similarity of the head to Drummond's portrait and Thompson's engraving suggests that it was most likely executed during the expedition of 1821-23, rather than the later ones, which adds support to the dating of Cartmell's picture to 1821-22.
- <sup>31</sup> Clive Holland says that Parry reached the furthest north 'at about 82° 45"N', but that because their southerly drift was more rapid than their northerly progress they finally turned back at 82° 40' 23" N. C. Holland, *Arctic Exploration and Development c.500 B.C. to 1915: An Encyclopedia* (New York and London: Garland, 1994), 200.
- <sup>32</sup> Both Parry and Franklin were knighted on 29 April 1829, and both received honorary D.C.L. degrees from Oxford University on 1 July 1829.
- <sup>33</sup> Parry, *Parry of the Arctic*, 322.

