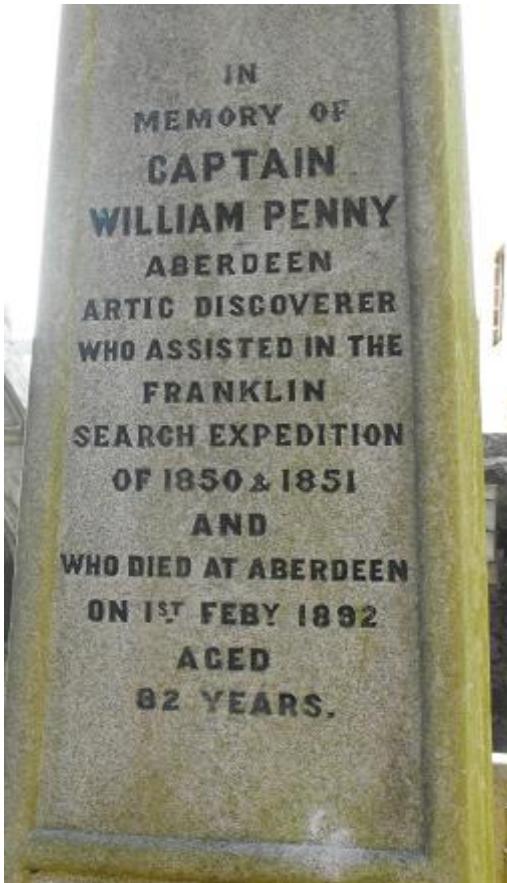


William (1809 - 1892) - Arctic Explorer and Whaling Captain - my "fourth cousin"



Born in Peterhead on 1 July 1809, he died at 22 Springbank Terrace, Aberdeen on 1 February 1892 – commemorated by a wall plaque “Arctic Explorer and Navigator lived here”. He is buried in St Nicholas Cemetery, Aberdeen with his wife, Margaret Irvine who in accompanying him on an 1857 whaling voyage was the first European woman to winter at Baffin Island.

He went to sea at an early age with his father, William (born 1775, died 1853), who was a whaler skipper. An early advocate of marine steam power there is a story that a crew, taking longer to appreciate the merits of steam, threatened to tar and feather him! He commanded the first steam whaler into Arctic regions.

“The Whaler” played a major part in the search for Sir John Franklin and the crews of Erebus and Terror who were lost during an attempt to discover the Northwest Passage. During an 1847 whaling voyage into Lancaster Sound on the Saint Andrew, Captain William Penny undertook the first maritime search for Sir John Franklin’s ships, Erebus and Terror – he found no traces. In 1849, with Captain Parker of the Truelove, he again attempted to search Lancaster Sound while in command of the Advice – ice barred their progress. Then in 1850 he led the first formal expedition in search of Sir John Franklin who had gone missing when charting the Arctic regions five years earlier. Penny’s brig was named after his patron, Lady Franklin, the second wife of the missing explorer. He had pointed the way into Lancaster Sound for Franklin searches and found traces of Franklin’s 1845-46 winter quarters on Beechey Island but none of the 129 members of the expedition.

Peter Cormack Sutherland was surgeon to the 1850/51 expedition and wrote two books (with input from William Penny) - “Journal of a Voyage in Baffin’s Bay and Barrow Straits (Volumes 1 and 2)”. A gripping read about the incredible fortitude of these explorers of over 150 years ago. William’s wife - Margaret - set off with her husband in 1857 to become the first European woman to winter at Baffin Island. A combination of her unabridged journal and W Gillies Ross’s knowledge of whaling are in “This Distant and Unsurveyed Country” - another intriguing read.



Much has been written about my "fourth cousin" and many fellow Pennys seeking our roots have discovered our relationship to him and, as such, to one another. His father, William (1775 - 1858) was a brother of my great, great, great grandfather James (1781 -1858).

Historically he has not been given as much credit as perhaps he deserves for his involvement in the search for the ill-fated Franklin expedition. However, he has other achievements (not without some setbacks) to his name which, in itself, is reflected in some Arctic locations – Penny Strait (between Bathurst and Devon Islands), Penny Ice Cap and Penny Highlands (Baffin Island) - lasting memorials.

Here are some of his other influences and achievements:

Having followed his father (William Penny snr.) into the whaling trade aged 12, William became a mate before he was 21 and master before 27. From 1821 to 1864 he sailed almost annually – sometimes twice in one year – interrupting whaling for a few mercantile voyages between 1841 and 1843 and the 1850/51 Franklin expedition.

In collaboration with Eenooolooapik, a native of the Cumberland Sound area, Penny drew up a map that would enable whalers to find and enter new, lucrative whaling grounds. The young Inuit came to Aberdeen to assist Penny to gain publicity and government support for an exploratory voyage to find the entrance to the Sound which had not been entered by European explorers since Davis in 1585 and 1587. The Treasury approved £20 pounds for Eenooolooapik to take goods home. In 1840 they had an exploratory success. The Penny name comes up in 1953 in a report on botanical observations on the Penny Highlands of Baffin Island – other discoveries.

He was concerned that the Arctic Regions north of Canada might fall to the United States. They had been considered British since many discovery expeditions following Frobisher's in 1576. With other members of the Aberdeen Arctic Company an ambitious scheme was designed for Arctic whaling between Novaya Zemlya and Baffin Island involving steam whalers, permanent settlements and subsidiary mining of plumbago. The scheme was never realised as the application in 1852 for a large grant of land on Baffin Island was opposed by rival whaling interests and was rejected by the government. However, he established small, temporary shore bases during his whaling voyages. The Arctic islands did eventually transfer to Canada.

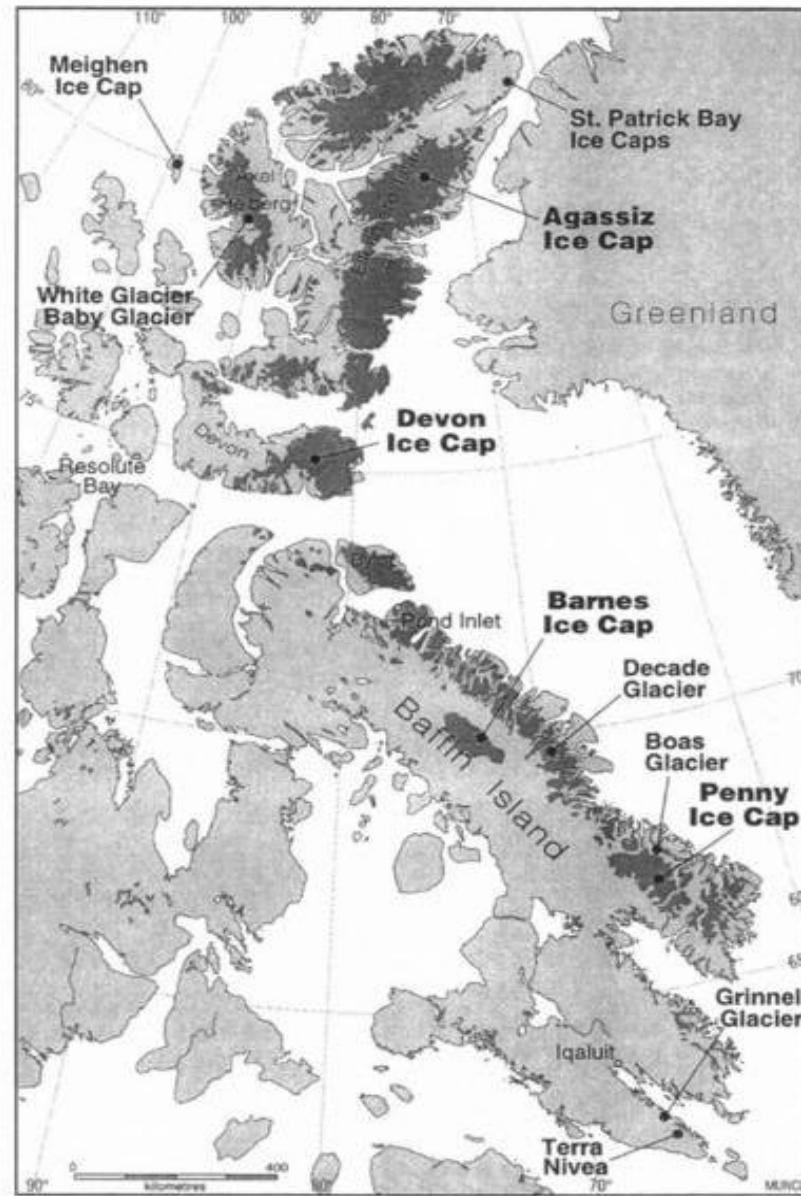
An early advocate of marine steam power there is a story that a crew, taking longer to appreciate the merits of steam, threatened to tar and feather him! He commanded the first steam whaler into Arctic regions.

He pioneered over-wintering with native Inuit at Cumberland Sound to be able to start whaling much earlier in the season.

Penny realised that some aspects of whaling such as alien modes of behaviour and unfamiliar diseases could prove harmful to the native inhabitants and he was determined to soften the blow of whaling by introducing Christian teaching. In 1857 he took a Moravian missionary, Mathias Warmow, to preach to Inuit at Kekerten and other places during the winter. The Moravian church later decided it would not be feasible to establish a permanent mission in the region.

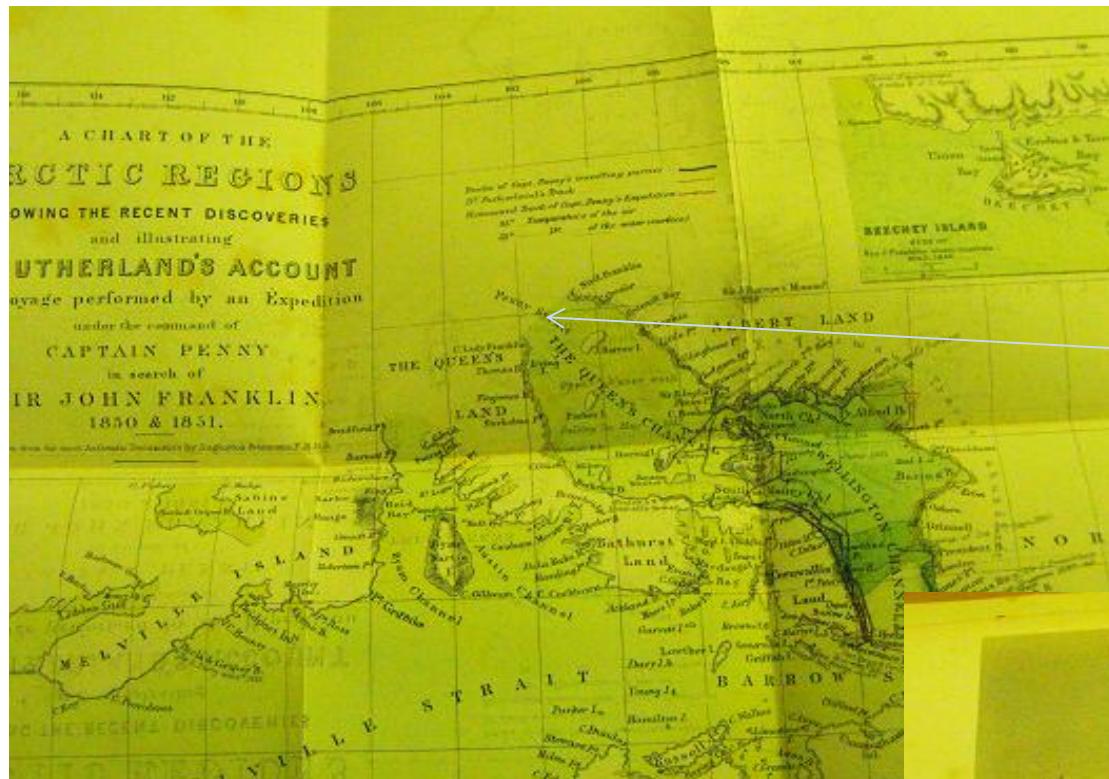


This painting by Stephen Pearce (1819 – 1904) shows Penny in his explorer's garb with a view of the Arctic, including a team of dogs, behind him. The inscription on the flag reads: 'God aiding us we will do our duty'. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London.



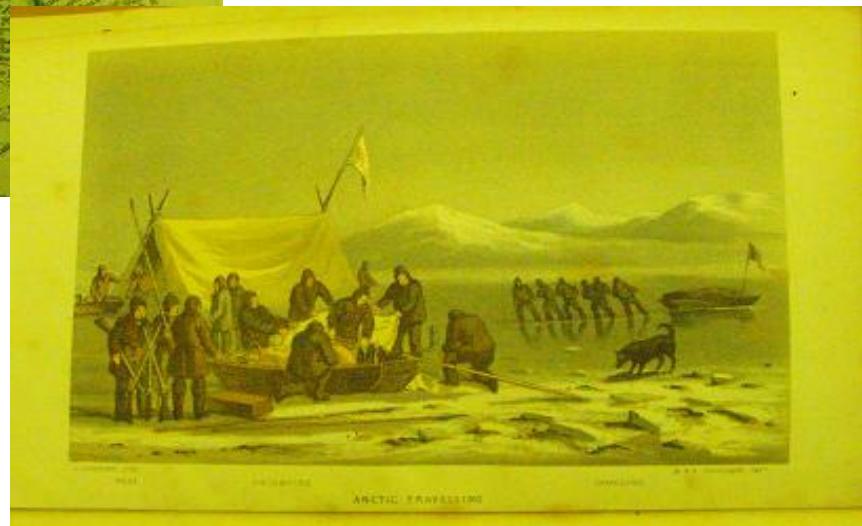
Do any of the Penny line associate a likeness?

Three geographic locations are named after William Penny (1809 -1892) - Penny Strait (between Bathurst and Devon Islands), Penny Ice Cap / Glacier and Penny Highlands (on Baffin Island).

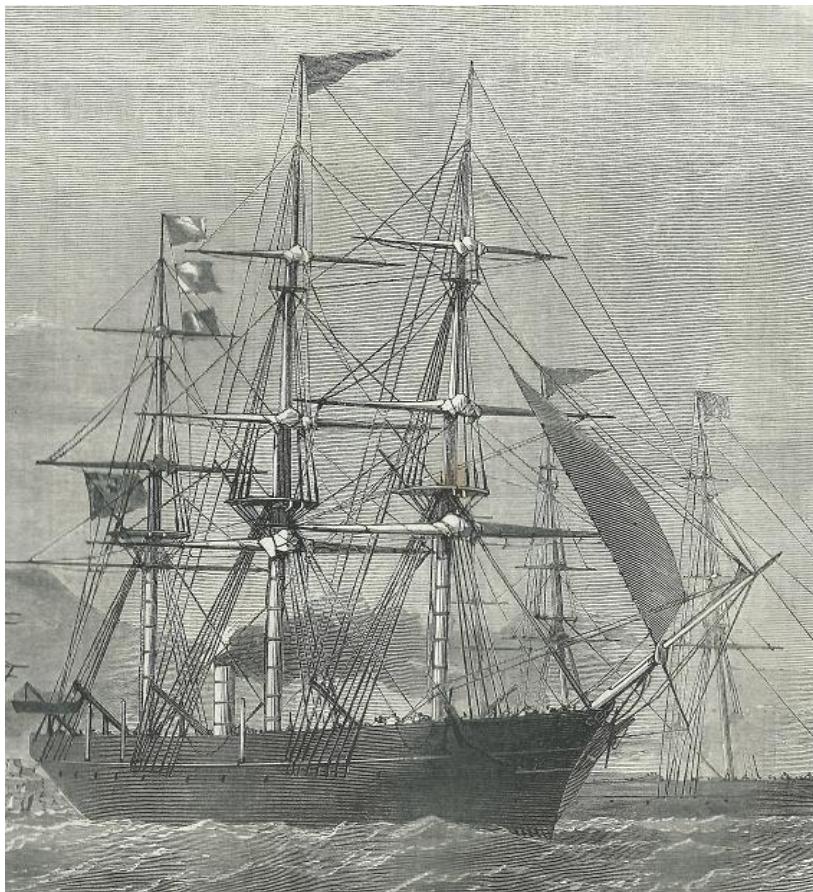


Penny Strait

Photographed from the 1st Edition of Peter Cormack Sutherland's book in the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.

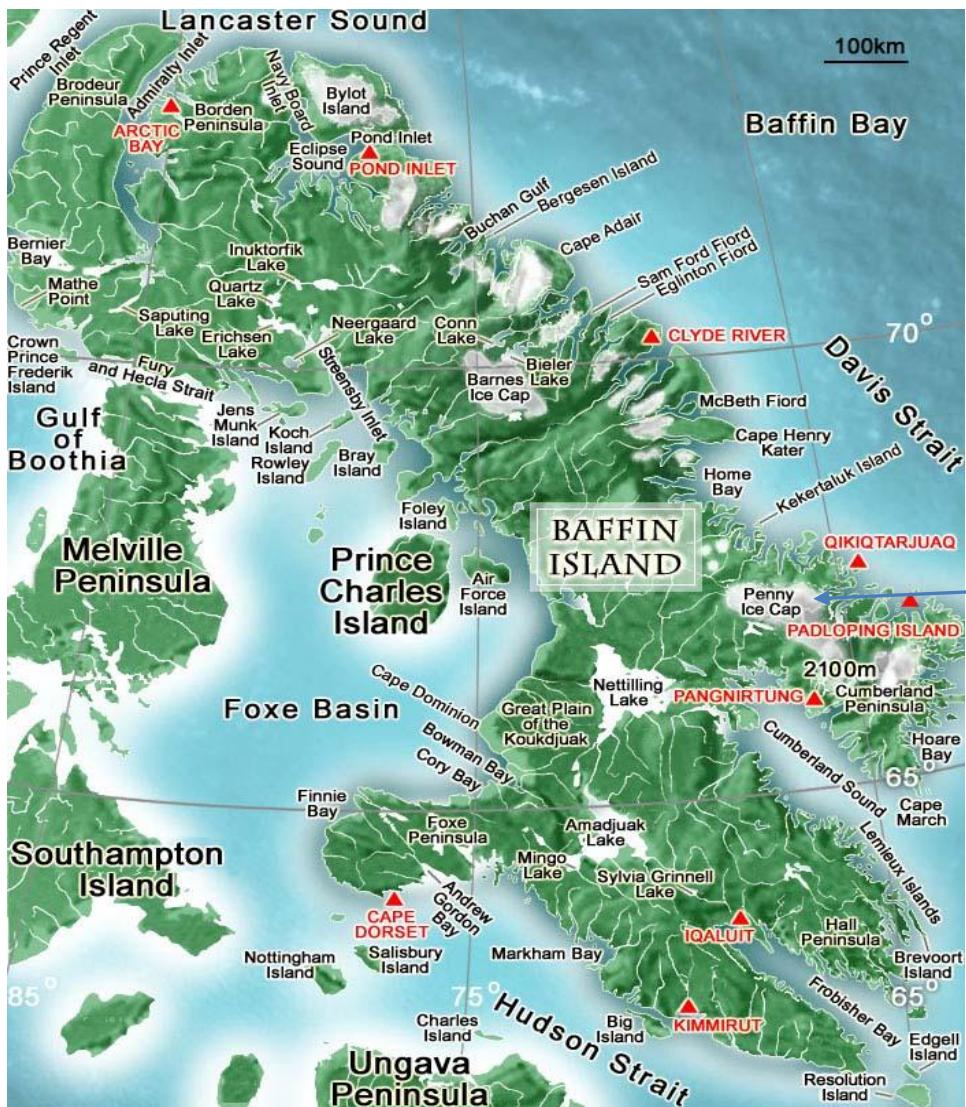


Arctic Travelling →



Polynia - from The Illustrated London News - March 16, 1861

William Penny was captain of this Dundee screw whaler.



Map of Baffin Island (courtesy of university of Guelph, Canada) showing Penny Ice Cap