

Valentines Day aboard HMS Plover 1853



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The following is an extract from the journal of Rochfort Maguire, Captain of HMS Plover. At this time HMS Plover was frozen in over winter at Point Barrow, Alaska. The ship had become the fall-back supply ship for HMS Enterprise and HMS Investigator involved in the search for Sir John Franklin in Alaska.

Monday, February 14th 1853:

This being Valentines day Doctor Simpson who had received from our kind friend Mr Barrow of the Admiralty, several humorous engravings for winters amusement, previous to our leaving London – gave people on the lower deck a very agreeable surprise this evening, by sending each a Valentine, selected by him as nearly in accordance with their characters, as he could, and addressed after the manner of

seamen's letters in general, naming the ship the individual had last served in, with the addition of a few trys here & there, until Icy Cape, Point Barrow, or some such warm sounding name closed the catalogue – The perfect secrecy with which the joke was kept, made it the more appreciated the only previous notice given, was an advertisement in the Weekly Guy, for a few additional hands in the post office, referring candidates to Mr Johnson Post Master – The only gentleman of that name on board being the Serjeant of Marines, was of course obliged to take office without being any way admitted to the secret – This morning while he was absent attending me around the lower deck, one of Doctor Simpson's accomplices (only three in number & officers) pasted a large placard of Post Office on the Serjeants door, where he found it much to his surprise on his return. And I am told hardly knew how to feel, not understanding the joke, but no doubt concluded there would something come out of it –

In the mean time the letters, had been placed in two bags, so as to extend the surprise over a double length of time, when shortly after the people had supped, a bugle sounded, announcing the arrival (by the main hatch way off deck) of a mail at the post office. Mr Johnson was now made aware for the first time of his duties – And on issuing the Valentines, which were of a very gaudy description, such as one seen displayed in cheap print shop windows, and well adapted for the people they were attended to amuse – The effect was equaling the fullest extent, to that wished, by the pains taking contriver of the plot – Which was concluded with an allowance of grog to wash down their Valentines, and no doubt pleasing thoughts caused by them, of our own happy land, where ones thoughts are more apt to roam, from the contrast with our present dismal abode.



A sailor's shellwork valentine 33cms in diameter from Barbados circa 1850