

EDWARD ARMSTON-SHERET

**“A GOOD ADVERTISEMENT FOR TEATOTALERS”: POLAR
EXPLORERS AND DEBATES OVER THE HEALTH EFFECTS OF
ALCOHOL AS PUBLISHED IN *THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF
ALCOHOL AND DRUGS*.**

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“A good advertisement for teetotalers”: Polar explorers and debates over the health effects of alcohol, 1875–1904.¹

Abstract: This paper examines discussions about drink and temperance on British polar expeditions around the turn of the twentieth century. In doing so, I highlight how expeditionary debates about drinking reflected broader shifts in social and medical attitudes towards alcohol. These changes meant that by the latter part of the nineteenth century, practices of expeditionary drinking could make or break the reputation of a polar explorer, particularly on an expedition that experienced an outbreak of scurvy. At the same time, I demonstrate the importance of travel and exploration in changing medical understandings of alcohol. I examine these issues through an analysis of two expeditions organized along naval lines—the British Arctic Expedition (1875–6) and the British National Antarctic Expedition (1901–4)—and, in doing so, demonstrate that studying

¹ I would like to thank Dr James Kneale, Dr Innes M. Keighren, and Professor Klaus Dodds for their invaluable comments on drafts of this paper. An earlier version of this paper was also presented in a seminar at the Huntington Library, California, and benefited from the comments and suggestions of those who attended. This research was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) through the TECHE doctoral training partnership and by an AHRC International Placement Scheme Fellowship at the Huntington Library.

exploration can offer new insights into changing attitudes towards drink and temperance in the long nineteenth century.

In early May 1876, Commander Albert Markham and his companions were struggling north across the sea ice of the high Arctic. Their strained bodies were already beginning to show signs of scurvy and pulling their sledge over the hummocky ice was becoming increasingly difficult work. After a hard day's march, Markham, like most of the men under his command, drank a tot of rum before going to sleep. As he felt the drinks' warming, relaxing effects take hold, he shut his eyes and tried to get some much-needed rest. While drinking his nightcap, Markham likely had little idea how controversial this practice would become. Upon the expedition's return, temperance campaigners and much of the medical press would argue that this rum ration had contributed to the men's physical breakdown on the journey. Soon, an Admiralty committee tasked with investigating the causes of the scurvy outbreak was formed, and it devoted considerable attention to the expedition's drinking practices. The expedition's drinking habits had become a focal point for broader disputes about the health effects of alcohol.

This paper examines these late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century debates about the health effects of polar drinking by investigating the approach to alcohol on two polar expeditions, the British Arctic Expedition (BAE, 1875–6) and the British National Antarctic Expedition (BNAE, 1901–4). I explore how polar expeditions became both the source of and evidence within discussions about the health effects of alcohol from the latter part of the nineteenth century. Before this period, some medics regarded alcohol as a useful and warming stimulant that would help people in cold climates. This view, however, came

under growing scrutiny from medics influenced by temperance ideas, meaning that even defenders of polar drinking increasingly focused on alcohol's psychological effects. I demonstrate that an outbreak of scurvy on the BAE brought to the fore these disagreements and led to the criticism of polar drinking from a range of positions. After this incident, drink became a major reputational issue for explorers, leading to greater restrictions on expeditionary drinking specifically and changing representations of drinking practices more generally.

The relationship between drink and class relations in the Royal Navy is a longer-standing historiographical focus to which this paper contributes.² I suggest that attitudes to drinking on expeditions changed during the nineteenth century, particularly amongst naval medics and officers. Whereas officers, medics, and sailors drank rum while sledging on the BAE, drinking patterns were more divided along class lines on the BNAE, with the expedition's leader claiming that his officers had little taste for alcohol. These portrayals were also shaped by an outbreak of scurvy on the expedition. In examining these issues, I explore how temperance campaigners contributed to a broader "temperance culture" in which alcohol was increasingly interpreted as unhealthy and medically unnecessary by

² I build on the work of those who have studied class relations on polar expedition, most notably Ben Maddison, *Class Colonialism, and Antarctic Exploration, 1750–1920*, (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014). For discussions of naval class relations in earlier periods, see Thomas Malcomson, *Order and Disorder in the British Navy, 1793–1815 : Control, Resistance, Flogging and Hanging*, (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2016).

individuals outside of the organized temperance movement.³ Finally, I show that public proclamations of moderation and abstinence were not necessarily accurate or honest and that, more significantly, changing medical understandings of alcohol did not end drunkenness on expeditions. In focusing on explorers, this paper also contributes to literatures that have sought to globalize the history of the temperance movement, highlighting how domestic debates about temperance need to be linked to questions of travel, globalization, and empire.⁴ Moreover, by studying explorers' relationships to wider

³ Harry Levine, "Temperance Cultures: Alcohol as a Problem in Nordic and English-Speaking Cultures" in Malcom Lader, Griffith Edwards, and Colin Drummond, eds. *The Nature of Alcohol and Drug-Related Problems*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 16-36.

⁴ There is a growing body of literature on drink and temperance in the colonial context, examining how the regulation of drink and representations of drunkenness played a central role in both colonial rule and resistance to it. See, for instance, James H. Mills and Patricia Barton eds., *Drugs and Empires: Essays in Modern Imperialism and Intoxication, c. 1500–c. 1930*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Erika Rappaport, *A Thirst for Empire: How Tea Shaped the Modern World*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); Harald Fischer-Tine, "'The drinking habits of our countrymen': European Alcohol Consumption and Colonial Power in British India," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 40 no. 3 (2012), 383–408; Emmanuel Akyeampong, "What's in a Drink? Class Struggle,

debates about drinking, I reaffirm Max Jones' observation that the study of heroes and changing ideas of heroism can be used to shed light on broader socio-cultural changes.⁵

The paper is divided into three sections: the first contextualizes debates about drinking on polar expeditions, examining nineteenth-century temperance movements and changing medical understandings of alcohol; the second considers debates about drinking on the BAE; the third addresses the different ways alcohol was used and represented on the BNAE. Ultimately, the paper shows that drinking patterns on polar expeditions both reflected changing understandings of alcohol—meaning drink was increasingly a reputational issue—and provided an important source of evidence in medical debates about drinking. In doing so, the paper suggests that studying travel and exploration can develop understandings of drink and temperance and that explorers deserve further attention from historians interested in drugs and alcohol.

Temperance, and health, alcohol in the nineteenth century

The nineteenth century saw huge changes in public and scientific attitudes towards drinking in Britain, developments that shaped polar drinking practices. The growing campaigns against drink, drunkenness, and alcoholism from the 1830s were one of the

Popular Culture and the Politics of Akpeteshie (Local Gin) in Ghana, 1930–67,” *Journal of African History* 37, no. 2 (1996), 215–36.

⁵ On this point, see Max Jones, “What Should Historians do with Heroes? Reflections on Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Britain,” *History Compass* 5 no. 2, (2007), 439-454.

main drivers of change.⁶ These temperance campaigns—often with their origins in working-class evangelical Christianity—sought to dissuade people from drinking by highlighting its negative moral and physical effects and later to restrict and prohibit the sale of alcohol. Initially, temperance societies focused on promoting voluntary abstinence and were primarily concerned about the effects of spirits. However, the 1830s and 40s saw growing support for total abstinence, as ever more societies took the “teetotal pledge.”⁷ The methods of the temperance campaign also changed. Following the formation of the United Kingdom Alliance for the Suppression of the Liquor Traffic in 1853 there was growing support for prohibition within the temperance movement.⁸ By the 1870s, the

⁶ Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England, 1815–1872*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1971), 23; Lilian Lewis Shiman, *The Crusade Against Drinking in Victorian England*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988); Thora Hands, *Drinking in Victorian and Edwardian Britain: Beyond the Spectre of the Drunkard*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). For a broader view of drinking in England, see also Paul Jennings, *A History of Drink and the English, 1500–2000*, (London: Routledge, 2016).

⁷ Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, 63–85, 131.

⁸ Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, 21, 85.

temperance movement was “flourishing” and dominated by prohibitionists.⁹ More concerned with public than private drinking, the campaign contributed to the passing of the 1872 Licensing Act, which led to greater state control of the alcohol trade designed to prevent public drunkenness and disorder.¹⁰ Parallel temperance campaigns took place in the Royal Navy. These developments deserve attention considering that for much of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, British polar expeditions were predominantly ship-based and most had some degree of naval involvement. On these maritime expeditions, practices of drinking were shaped by naval tradition and naval temperance campaigns.

There is a long tradition of naval drinking: the midday tot of rum had become an established part of naval custom by the nineteenth century and remained a fixture of rations until 1970. Rum became a popular naval drink after the British captured Jamaica in the seventeenth century, as it was less perishable and easier to ship than other alcoholic beverages and was often considered safer than water. The size of the rum ration changed

⁹ Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, 182–201. James Kneale, “The Place of Drink: Temperance and the Public, 1856–1914,” *Social and Cultural Geography* 2, no. 1 (2010), 43–59, at 44.

¹⁰ James Kneale, “The Place of Drink,” 44, 56; Hands, *Drinking in Victorian and Edwardian Britain*, 25. For an analysis of the changing role of the government in regulating drinking, see James Nicholls, *The Politics of Alcohol: A History of the Drink Question in England*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

over time: during the Napoleonic Wars (1803–15), sailors were issued half a pint of rum diluted with a quart of water daily. However, in 1824 the ration was reduced to a quarter of a pint of rum per day.¹¹

Because of the rum ration and their “reputation for drunkenness and licentiousness ashore,” sailors became a target of temperance campaigners in the mid nineteenth century. However, these efforts remained fragmented until the formation of The Royal Naval Temperance Society (RNTS) in 1873, which became the main naval temperance organization. Temperance campaigners encouraged sailors to take temperance pledges and campaigned to end the naval rum ration. Unlike some of the earlier independent naval temperance societies, the leadership of the RNTS was solidly middle class, reflecting a broader shift that took place in temperance campaigns around this time. The emergence of a middle-class leadership meant that naval temperance campaigns were mainly directed at changing the drinking patterns of working-class sailors rather than officers, who were seen as more able to manage their alcohol consumption in a responsible way.¹²

¹¹ Mary Conley, “‘You don’t make a Torpedo Gunner out of a Drunkard:’ Agnes Weston, Temperance, and The British Navy,” *The Northern Mariner/Le Marin du Nord* 9 no. 1 (1999), 1–22, at 3; Richard Moore, “‘We Are a Modern Navy’: Abolishing the Royal Navy’s Rum Ration,” *The Mariner’s Mirror* 103, no. 1 (2017), 67–79, at 67–68.

¹² Mary Conley, *From Jack Tar to Union Jack: Representing Naval Manhood in the British Empire, 1870–1918*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 66–98; Conley, “‘You don’t make a Torpedo Gunner out of a Drunkard,’ 2–5.

The aims of the RNTS had significant support from within the Admiralty, which was working to expand and professionalize the navy. Many senior officers were concerned about the effects of drink on naval discipline and efficiency and were, therefore, sympathetic to the activities of the RNTS. While the navy never seriously considered ending the rum ration because of its popularity amongst the sailors, the Admiralty undertook initiatives to reduce and regulate it from the mid nineteenth century: the size, frequency and, later, the strength of the rum ration were further reduced; sailors were provided with alternative drinks, such as tea and coffee; and those who abstained from rum were financially compensated.¹³ Despite such establishment support, naval temperance campaigns remained small, partly because sailors rejected campaigners' suggestions that their drinking habits were undisciplined or shameful.¹⁴

The temperance movement also shaped medical attitudes towards drinking and understandings of the relationship between body and environment. As Joanne Woiak notes, there was initially considerable hostility to the temperance movement amongst medics, many of whom relied on alcohol as a treatment.¹⁵ For example, John Brown, the Scottish

¹³ Conley, ““You don’t make a Torpedo Gunner out of a Drunkard,”” 3–4.

¹⁴ Conley, *From Jack Tar to Union Jack*, 78– 87; Conley, ““You don’t make a Torpedo Gunner Out of a Drunkard.””

¹⁵ Joanne Woiak, “A Medical Cromwell to Depose King Alcohol”: Medical Scientists, Temperance Reformers, and the Alcohol Problem in Britain,” *Historie Sociale/Social History* 27, no.54 (1994), 337–365. Paradoxically this period also saw tentative efforts to

doctor and founder of Brunonian medicine, argued that all disease was caused by stimulation of the body (either too much or too little) and prescribed medical interventions to restore balance.¹⁶ If the body was over-stimulated, Brown proposed treatments designed to cool and purge it. However, if the patient's illness was seen to be a result of under-excitement, then Brown prescribed "stimulants", such as alcohol, opium, and rich food to invigorate and warm the body, thereby restoring balance. Temperature and environment played an important role in these theories: Brown argued that in cold climates stimulants were necessary to help promote the circulation of blood to the body's extremities.¹⁷

Brown's views about the relationship between alcohol and cold were not mainstream in Britain but were nevertheless echoed by other medics. The Scottish naval doctor Thomas Trotter, in his pioneering paper on the treatment of alcoholism, reported how drunk men appeared able to "resist the operation of the cold." Trotter included several anecdotes about drunken men surviving potentially fatal exposures. Again, these effects were attributed to alcohol's stimulating qualities. Trotter noted how alcohol increased the "vigour of the circulation of the blood." Unlike Brown, though, Trotter saw these effects as

approach alcoholism as a medical problem see William F. Bynum, "Chronic Alcoholism in the first half of the Nineteenth Century," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 42, no. 2 (1968), 160–85.

¹⁶ John Brown, *The Elements of Medicine*, translated by Thomas Beddoes, (Portsmouth, NH: William & Daniel Treadwell 1803); Bynum, "Chronic Alcoholism," 161.

¹⁷ Brown, *The Elements of Medicine*, 142–144; Bynum, "Chronic Alcoholism," 161.

temporary and, ultimately, harmful.¹⁸ By the mid nineteenth century these ideas began to come under growing scrutiny due to the growth of the temperance movement and changing scientific ideas about alcohol. By this point, opposition to drinking had gained support from doctors—including many outside the temperance movement—who increasingly sought to treat drunkenness as a medical problem and to justify abstinence in scientific terms. By doing so, medics were able to gain influence over a broader range of social issues.¹⁹

The English physician and popularizer of science William Carpenter, who came from a temperance family, discussed the negative health effects of alcohol at length in his influential book *On the Use and Abuse of Alcoholic Liquors in Health and Disease* (1850).²⁰ Though not a paid-up member of any temperance society Carpenter, through this book, helped to discredit the idea that alcohol was a normal or necessary part of diet.²¹ Indeed, he argued that drink was, in fact, unnecessary and harmful in most situations. Carpenter devoted specific attention to the relationship between alcohol and cold weather.

¹⁸ Thomas Trotter, *An Essay, Medical, Philosophical, and Chemical, on Drunkenness, and its Effects on the Human Body*, (London: T.N. Longman, and O. Rees, 1804), 48–50, 45.

¹⁹ Woiak, “A Medical Cromwell.”

²⁰ William Carpenter, *On the Use and Abuse of Alcoholic Liquors in Health and Disease*, (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1850). Woiak, “A Medical Cromwell,” 349 discusses Carpenter’s background.

²¹ Woiak, “A Medical Cromwell,” 349.

Like earlier theorists, he held that cold climates required special articles of diet to warm the body. Carpenter suggested that while alcohol could, in some circumstances, fuel and heat the body, other warming foods such as rich, fatty meals and hot drinks could perform the same function equally well. However, Carpenter saw respiration as central to producing warmth and argued that alcohol polluted the blood and inhibited this process. These polluting effects meant that alcohol's positive effects were only ever temporary and weakened the body's resistance to cold in the long run. Carpenter conceded that alcohol's stimulating qualities could render it an acceptable (though far from ideal) supply where short bursts of exertion were required.²²

With little information on the impact of cold available from laboratory experiments, Carpenter drew much of his evidence to support these theories from the experiences of working men, soldiers, and polar explorers. Carpenter included testimony from the botanist and explorer Joseph Hooker, who had been on a naval expedition to Antarctica between 1839 and 1842. Hooker reported that while alcohol might be enjoyable to drink, it had dangerous cooling effects—a view that Carpenter endorsed.²³ To be sure, the use of explorers' testimony to demonstrate the superiority of temperance was a common feature of pro-abstinence literature in the latter half of the nineteenth century.²⁴

²² Carpenter, *On the Use and Abuse of Alcoholic Liquors*, 107–122.

²³ Carpenter, *On the Use and Abuse of Alcoholic Liquors*, 118, 157–161.

²⁴ For instance, Peter Burne, *A Teetotaler's Companion; or, a Plea for Temperance*, (London: Authur Hall, 1847), 459; George Black, *Some Physical Aspects of the*

Edmund Parkes, the influential military physician, also condemned the use of alcohol to cope with extreme temperatures. Like Carpenter, Parkes was not a member of any temperance society. But, in his widely read manual on military hygiene, Parkes argued that alcohol reduced the ability of the body to expel waste products and lowered the temperature of the body by dilating the blood vessels. These effects made alcohol dangerous to consume in cold climates. Parkes argued that, instead, a wholesome and rich diet was a better way to provide the body with the “animal heat” required to resist cold.²⁵ Parkes also questioned the idea that alcohol was a useful stimulant even for short bursts of hard work, suggesting that it weakened both the muscular and mental power of the drinker. Parkes later conducted a widely cited experiment on drinking and non-drinking laboring men which showed that drink reduced the men’s capacity for work.²⁶

Like Carpenter, Parkes drew much of his evidence about the effects of alcohol from the experiences of polar explorers, including Hooker and several other British naval explorers, many of whom had been on the recent Franklin search expeditions. Parkes

Temperance Question, (Barret: London, 1890), 17; Peter T. Winskill, *The Temperance Movement and its Workers: A Record of Social, Moral, Religious and Political Progress*, vol. 3, (London: Blackie and Sons, 1892), 193.

²⁵ Edmund Parkes, *A Manual of Practical Hygiene: Prepared Especially for Use in the Medical Service of the Army*, 2nd ed., (London: Churchill and Sons, 1866), 140–141.

²⁶ Parkes, *A Manual of Practical Hygiene*, 243–6, 581; Woiak, “A Medical Cromwell,” 355.

also saw future expeditions as a means to collect further evidence on drinking and its impact on the body. Both he and Carpenter provided advice pamphlets to the medical officers on BAE, suggesting the expedition provided an ideal opportunity to test the health effects of alcohol in a cold climate. Parkes warned, however, that alcohol was unlikely to be useful because of its “nerve deadening” effects.²⁷

Although medics generally agreed that excessive drinking was harmful, the health effects of moderate drinking were more contentious. Reflecting broader medical debates, Parkes, unlike Carpenter, believed that moderate drinking could be acceptable in some circumstances. Here, he drew on the work of the English doctor Edward Francis Anstie, who attempted to investigate and define acceptable levels of alcohol consumption.²⁸ By

²⁷ These observations were, however, never made. Anon., “The Arctic Expedition and Its Temperance Moral,” *The Medical Temperance Journal* no. 30, (January 1877), 53–72, at 58; Anon, *Report of The Admiralty Committee on Causes of the Outbreak of Scurvy in the recent Arctic Expedition* [hereafter *Report of the Admiralty Committee on Scurvy*], (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1877), 94.

²⁸ James Kneale, “‘These Are the Cases Who Call Themselves “Moderate Drinkers,” Because They Are Never Seen Embracing a Lamp-Post’: The Problem of Moderate Drinking in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Britain,” in Mathew Ingleby, Samuel Randalls eds., *Just Enough. The History, Culture and Politics of Sufficiency*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 77–94; James Kneale and Shaun French, “Moderate

1870, based on experimentation with brandy, Anstie defined a level of “safe” alcohol consumption known as Anstie’s limit. However, temperance campaigners and pro-abstinence medics were critical of suggestions that any level of alcohol consumption should be encouraged.²⁹ There were also divisions of opinion about the use of alcohol as medical treatment: even some pro-abstinence medics thought alcohol could be used as a medicine, while others remained opposed to its use in all circumstances.

Assessing the impact of these changes on actual drinking practices remains a complex undertaking. Drink consumption in Britain certainly declined from the mid-1870s.³⁰ The same period also saw growing medical support for the disease concept of inebriety, which became a way of “medically diagnosing and treating heavy drinking.”³¹ However, as Virginia Berridge notes, only some of this decline can be ascribed to temperance campaigners, as the nineteenth century also saw other large social changes: by

Drinking Before the Unit: Medicine and Life Assurance in Britain and the US c.1860–1930,” *Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy* 22, no. 2 (2014), 111–117.

²⁹ Kneale and French, “Moderate Drinking Before the Unit,” 2–3. For contemporary arguments against moderation, see Anon, *Moderate Drinking: Opinions of Sir Henry Thompson, Dr. B.W Richardson, Rev. Cannon Farrar, Admiral Sir B. James Sullivan, Rev. Sinclair Paterson, Edward Bains, &c.*, (London: W. Tweedie & Co., 1877).

³⁰ Virginia Berridge, *Demons: Our Changing Attitudes to Alcohol, Tobacco, and Drugs*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 48.

³¹ Hands, *Drinking in Victorian and Edwardian Britain*, 96, 2.

the 1870s, working people had greater access to holidays, leisure time, and other activities not based around drink, meaning rising living standards did not lead to an increase in alcohol consumption as in earlier periods.³² Even so, temperance campaigners failed to achieve their objective of prohibition and became increasingly inward looking in the run-up to the First World War.³³ Moreover, alcoholic beverages remained popular amongst large sections of the population.

Drinking on polar expeditions was thus shaped by a variety of factors, including changing medical understandings of alcohol and environment, naval modernization initiatives, temperance campaigns, and broader social trends. Overall, though, by the 1870s the idea that alcohol was a useful supply in cold climates was being routinely questioned. Suggestions that alcohol had some limited stimulating qualities that would help with short bursts of physical exertion lasted somewhat longer but were also being contested. Importantly, polar expeditions played an important role in these shifting debates about the health effects of alcohol, and both Parkes and Carpenter drew on the experiences of polar travelers extensively, confirming Vanessa Heggie's observation that exploration was an important part of scientific practice before the First World War, particularly in changing understanding of human physiology.³⁴

³² Berridge, *Demons*, 48.

³³ Berridge, *Demons*, 48.

³⁴ Vanessa Heggie, "Critiques and Contentions: Why Isn't Exploration a Science?" *Isis* 105, no.2 (2014), 318–34.

Rum or lime juice? Debates over drinking on the National Arctic Expedition

In November 1876, the British Arctic Expedition (BAE) became a focal point in these wider debates about relationship between drink, environment, and health. The well-funded naval expedition—comprised of two ships, HMS *Alert* and HMS *Discovery*—had returned after less than two years in the Arctic with half the men suffering scurvy and four deaths. The expedition had originally been tasked with trying to reach the North Pole through a hypothesized open polar sea route. Once in the Arctic, however, thick sea-ice, problems with sledging equipment, and an outbreak of scurvy limited the expedition's progress.

The expedition was led by George Nares, an established naval commander who had returned early from leading a worldwide oceanographic expedition to take command of the BAE. While the expedition generated some positive coverage around its new northerly record, there was widespread dismay in the popular press that the expedition had succumbed to scurvy.³⁵ Following press outcry, parliament called for an inquiry into the outbreak, and this inquiry triggered public debates about practices of drinking on the expedition. The inquiry was conducted by a committee of prominent medics, naval officers and explorers: James Hope, a high-ranking admiral and the Queen's top naval advisor;

³⁵ Kenneth J. Carpenter, *A History of Vitamin C and Scurvy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 133–143.

Edward Inglefield and Richard Collinson, who were both naval officers with experience of polar exploration; James Donnet, a high-ranking naval medic; and Thomas Fraser, a civilian medic and Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. The inquiry was a major undertaking, with evidence collected from explorers, medics and naval officers. Yet, the voices of the expedition's sailors were, however, notably absent from the testimony. The fact that an outbreak of scurvy led to a debate about practices of drinking is a product of contemporary understandings of the disease.³⁶ We now understand that scurvy is a result of chronic vitamin C deficiency; however, vitamin C was neither discovered nor isolated until the early twentieth century and, before this, the disease was interpreted differently.³⁷

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, scurvy was a shameful disease—partly due to its unpleasant mental and physical symptoms, but also because the disease appeared more common in certain bodies. Scurvy often appeared in those who suffered poor living conditions on long sea journeys, such as slaves and transported convicts.³⁸ The shame

³⁶ Jonathan Lamb, *Scurvy: The Disease of Discovery*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

³⁷ Carpenter, *A History of Scurvy and Vitamin C*; Lamb, *Scurvy*; Mark Harrison, "Scurvy on Sea and Land: Political Economy and Natural History, c. 1780-c. 1850." *Journal for Maritime Research* 15, no. 1 (2013), 7–25; Carpenter, *A History of Vitamin C and Scurvy*; Edward Armston-Sheret, "Scurvy, Bad Food, and the Reputation of the British National Antarctic Expedition, 1901–1904," *Journal of Historical Geography*, (2019, in press).

³⁸ Lamb, *Scurvy*, 189–90, 219.

attached to the disease increased over the nineteenth century as it was increasingly seen as avoidable. Lime juice was introduced into naval rations in the late eighteenth century, which reduced instances of scurvy; however, how it actually worked was not understood, and orthodox medical opinion still held that environmental factors—particularly cold and damp—and underlying health issues such as alcoholism could cause or at least exacerbate the condition.³⁹

The search for factors beyond lime juice was a product of the fact that lime juice was often boiled and poorly stored, destroying much of its vitamin C and rendering it an unreliable prophylactic or cure for scurvy. In the mid nineteenth century, the navy switched from using the juice of lemons to West Indian limes, which contained much less vitamin C.⁴⁰ Explanations were further confounded by the fact that some people were able to avoid scurvy without drinking lime juice by consuming vitamin C from other sources, such as fresh meat and vegetables. Even though scurvy's exact causes were unknown, the disease was generally considered an avoidable affliction that could be prevented by wholesome and varied diet, consumption of lime juice, and by creating a generally healthy and hygienic atmosphere on board ship. Those who got the disease were vulnerable to suggestions they had neglected their bodies.

Many of the debates around the expedition centered on the question of lime juice; still, because of the idea that underlying health problems could contribute to scurvy, the

³⁹ Lamb, *Scurvy*, 9–12; Harrison, “Scurvy on Sea and Land,” 7–25.

⁴⁰ Lamb, *Scurvy*, 36–38.

issue of a rum ration also became controversial. Rum was issued to the men both on the ship and during the sledge journeys. During the inquiry, some sought to defend this decision, while others criticized it.

Arguments in support of the rum ration

For many explorers and several medics, rum was a useful supply on a polar expedition. The use of rum on the BAE also shows how naval custom around drink was adapted to the polar environment. When the men were sledging, rum was issued in the evenings, rather than the traditional midday naval ration, and both officers and men drank it, long after the officers' rum ration had stopped in normal naval service.

The timing of the rum ration was one of the main arguments presented in its favor. Many of those who had worked and explored in the Polar Regions gave evidence to the inquiry suggesting that the daily use of alcohol had positive effects in helping an explorer relax and sleep at night. One of rum's defenders was Dr Frederick William Pavy, a lecturer on Physiology at Guy's Hospital and a Fellow of the Royal Society. He argued before the inquiry that alcohol was useful when explorers were in a "sensitive, watchful state" and unable to go to sleep "as the result of exhaustion." In this situation, Pavy argued, alcohol helped to induce sleep because it "diminishes the tension...of the nervous system ... [and] makes a person feel more inwardly comfortable and contented, and more disposed to take

rest.”⁴¹ For Pavy, alcohol’s depressing effects, warned against by Parkes, were precisely what made it useful.

Likewise, William Augustus Guy, vice president of the Royal Society and a fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, argued that it could be “very beneficial” to issue rum “at night, before going to bed...when it appears that through excessive cold the crew are not sleeping.”⁴² Naval explorers who had been on other expeditions, also expressed their support for evening drinking, suggesting that the expedition’s approach to alcohol was not isolated. Rear-Admiral George Henry Richards—who had commanded several expeditions in the Arctic in the 1850s and had advised on the preparations for the BAE—claimed that rum “materially assisted” in getting the men under his command to sleep, helping to warm them and restore their circulation after a cold march.⁴³ Thus, alcohol was useful in helping explorers sleep because of both its warming and relaxing effects.

The positive effects of evening drinking were commented on directly by medics who had been on the expedition. Belgrave Ninnis, surgeon on the *Discovery*, offered the following insight: “I think from my own experience that the grog after one had turned into one’s bag at night, and just before going to sleep, produces a glow, which makes you start asleep, warm from the effects of the grog, and that glow is kept alive by thickness of the

⁴¹ *Report of the Admiralty Committee on Scurvy*, 176.

⁴² *Report of Admiralty Committee on Scurvy*, 190.

⁴³ *Report of Admiralty Committee on Scurvy*, 107.

clothes that you are sleeping in.”⁴⁴ Polar medics used rum themselves and thought it was useful because of the warming, soporific effect it produced.

While sledging, evening drinking was practiced by many of the BAE’s officers, and several provided evidence to the inquiry in support of it. Lieutenant Rawson, an officer on the *Discovery*, said that he thought that taking rum on a sledge journey was “a very good thing if taken at night before you turn in.”⁴⁵ Likewise, Commander Albert Markham, another of the *Alert*’s officers and one of the sledge party leaders, commented that rum was of value “provided it was always issued at the same time as ours [i.e., before bed], and *never* during the fatigues and exertions of the day ... it certainly imparts a glow that induces sleep.”⁴⁶

Officers on the BAE also supported the rum ration on the grounds of its cheering and morale-boosting effects. Commander Pelham Aldrich, an officer on the *Alert* who had led several sledge journeys, claimed that “[w]ith reference to rum, all my crew, including myself, drank it ... Our custom was, after tenting at night, to have our tea, then our pemmican, and then the allowance of rum. The rum and the tobacco together had, I consider, a most cheering and salutary effect on my sledge crew. Speaking from personal experience, I can only say after a heavy day’s march it is a most satisfactory thing to sit in

⁴⁴ *Report of Admiralty Committee on Scurvy*, 88.

⁴⁵ *Report of Admiralty Committee on Scurvy*, 43.

⁴⁶ Albert Markham, *The Great Frozen Sea: A Personal Narrative of the Voyage of the “Alert,”* (London: Keagan Paul and Co., 1880), 270.

one's sleeping bag, with one's head covered up, and smoke a pipe and drink one's rum." Likewise, Markham noted how rum "tends very materially to cheer and invigorate the men."⁴⁷ Drinking rum was seen as psychologically beneficial to both officers and men on the expedition.

Reflecting broader debates about the health effects of alcohol, those who supported evening drinking generally argued that moderate drinking had few negative effects. Markham, for instance, told the inquiry that on the expedition he had stopped drinking for four weeks on a spring sledging journey but that he "felt more cheerful" on "resuming a moderate consumption." Markham also claimed that moderate drinking made no difference to a man's ability to withstand scurvy, suggesting "he would as soon take a man of temperate habits as a total abstainer" on any future expedition.⁴⁸ Captain Nares shared this view, commenting that he had encountered no evidence that the abstainers were "either better or worse" than their drinking counterparts.⁴⁹ Markham maintained his support for moderate drinking in his book *The Great Frozen Sea* (1880). Here, he claimed that he would "deprecate very strongly any attempts to deprive the Arctic sledger of his small modicum of rum and water ... The quantity is so small that the most fanatical theorist cannot seriously maintain that it can do harm."⁵⁰ For Markham, polar drinking was

⁴⁷ Markham, *The Great Frozen Sea*, 270

⁴⁸ *Report of Admiralty Committee on Scurvy*, 28–9.

⁴⁹ *Report of Admiralty Committee on Scurvy*, 6.

⁵⁰ Markham, *The Great Frozen Sea*, 270.

acceptable provided it was not excessive, and supporters of abstinence were overstating the negative effects of moderate drinking.

Polar explorers and even some medics viewed alcohol as a useful, and perhaps even essential, supply on an Arctic expedition. Defenders of polar drinking focused primarily on the warming, sleep-inducing feeling it produced as well as its morale-boosting qualities—highlighting that medics were increasingly divided alcohol as a stimulant or a depressant. At the same time, they argued that the small quantity of rum issued was unlikely to cause the explorers any serious harm.

Opposition to Polar Drinking

Polar drinking also attracted fierce criticism. This opposition reached well beyond supporters of medical temperance. Opposition to polar drinking found support from many military medics, who saw restricting alcohol as part of a wider effort to reform and professionalize the navy. Much of the criticism of drinking on the BAE was linked to press reports that abstainers avoided scurvy. For instance, T. W. Glover, Chief Templar for South Hampshire, wrote to the *Daily News* claiming that four members of the Good-For-Evil Temperance lodge in Portsmouth had been on the expedition. Glover reported that none of the abstainers had “suffered from scurvy, frostbite, or any other sickness, although one, Adam Ayles was in the sledging party away from the ship 110 day and another of them 98 days.”⁵¹ This fact, Glover argued, proved the superiority of abstinence in polar

⁵¹ Anon., “Notices,” *Daily News*, November 14, 1876, 2.

climates. Such reports were picked up by medics who opposed drink and contributed to the Admiralty Committee's decision to investigate the how the expedition had used alcohol.⁵²

The argument that alcohol contributed to the scurvy outbreak was predicated on a perceived overlap in symptoms between scurvy and chronic alcoholism. *The Lancet* claimed that scurvy and alcoholism displayed similar symptoms—particularly weakened blood vessels, a feeble pulse, and decreased capacity for physical exertion.⁵³ The journal suggested that scurvy was probably caused by a gradual accumulation of toxins in the blood and suggested that drink, in further polluting the blood, exacerbated the disease. Likewise, James Edwards, Medical Officer of Health for St James' London, claimed that allowing the men to drink went against “all that we know in general as to the scurvy-producing qualities of alcohol.”⁵⁴

Another group of medics objected to the fact that alcohol was issued daily because they thought its short-term stimulating properties were harmful in the long run. A prominent proponent of this view was the famed Arctic explorer and medic John Rae, who made his name discovering the fate of the Franklin expedition more than twenty years earlier. He wrote to *The Lancet* after the return of the BAE, arguing that “even small quantities” of alcohol have “injurious effects.” He claimed that these ill effects were down

⁵² The letter was, for instance, reprinted in *The Lancet*, see John Rae, “Scurvy and the Arctic Expedition,” November 18, 1876, 733.

⁵³ Anon., “Alcohol and Scurvy,” *The Lancet*, December 2, 1876, 795.

⁵⁴ Anon., “The Arctic Expedition,” *The Times*, November 2, 1876, 6.

to the fact that alcohol stimulated the body but provided no real nutrition. Consequently, alcohol worked to generally “lessen the resisting power of the constitution to the reception of scurvy.”⁵⁵ George Busk, a Victorian polymath prominent in numerous scientific societies, shared Rae’s assessment. He advised the inquiry that “spirits should not be issued as a regular part of the rations, but should be reserved entirely for sudden emergencies.” Like Rae, he claimed that alcohol “affords no real sustenance, but rather consumes the strength.”⁵⁶ For these medics, regular drinking rendered explorers weaker and more susceptible to scurvy.

A major source of controversy was Nares’s decision to take rum instead of lime juice while sledging. While in the Arctic, one of the expedition’s surgeon, Thomas Colan, had advised Nares to send lime-juice on the sledge journeys, but this advice was ignored—a fact that came to light when he was questioned.⁵⁷ In advice echoed by numerous other medics, Colan argued that it would be “better to send the lime juice than the rum” on future polar expeditions.⁵⁸ Indeed, most medics who gave evidence to the inquiry—even those such as Pavy who supported drinking—argued that lime-juice should have been taken on the sledging journeys. This view was shared by the *British Medical Journal (BMJ)*. The

⁵⁵ Rae, “Scurvy and the Arctic Expedition,” 732–733. Rae echoed these views in front of the inquiry *Report of Admiralty Committee on Scurvy*, 285.

⁵⁶ *Report of Admiralty Committee on Scurvy*, 180.

⁵⁷ *Report of Admiralty Committee on Scurvy*, 70, 62–3.

⁵⁸ *Report of Admiralty Committee on Scurvy*, 70.

journal argued that rum “would find few defenders even as a luxury” in cold climates. Meanwhile, the journal described lime juice as an “absolute necessity” to ward off scurvy.⁵⁹ Why, the journal asked, had the unhealthy luxury been taken and the essential prophylactic left behind?

Responding to this evidence, the committee concluded that a small amount of rum might help polar explorers go to sleep, but the same effects could be achieved with non-alcoholic hot drinks, such as beef tea (i.e., Bovril).⁶⁰ The report attributed most of the blame for the scurvy outbreak to Nares for failing to take lime juice on the sledge journeys, suggesting he had neglected his duties and orders in doing so. While citing numerous factors that had contributed to the outbreak, the committee also confirmed the links between scurvy and alcoholism, reporting that “the first two cases of scurvy occurred in men who were addicted to an immoderate use of alcohol.”⁶¹

Medics who opposed drink saw the debate around the expedition as vindicating their position. In early 1877, *The Medical Temperance Journal* published an article titled “the Arctic Expedition and its Temperance Moral.” The journal collected together the

⁵⁹ Anon., “Alcohol and Lime Juice in the Arctic Regions,” *British Medical Journal* [hereafter *BMJ*], December 2, 1876, 724. *The Lancet* also raised similar concerns, Anon., “Scurvy and Arctic Exploration,” *The Lancet*, November 11, 1876, 689.

⁶⁰ *Report of Admiralty Committee on Scurvy*, xxv.

⁶¹ Other factors included a damp and vitiated atmosphere in the lower decks and the poorer diet given to the expedition’s sailors. *Report of Admiralty Committee on Scurvy*, xxiii.

evidence of medics who had criticized the use of alcohol on the expedition and argued that the expedition had provided a perfect “experiment” into the health effects of alcohol in a cold climate. The results, the journal concluded, represented “the triumph of teetotalism.”⁶² Such assessments found support within more mainstream medical publications. In 1879, the *BMJ* reported on another outbreak of scurvy on a British merchant ship. The journal claimed that the recent “Arctic outbreak” made it clear that “scurvy dogs the steps of those who prefer rum to lime-juice.” The *BMJ* advised: “in any future Arctic voyages, if any stores be left behind in starting a land expedition, it will be the rum rather than the lime-juice.”⁶³

The debates about drinking on the BAE struck a major blow against polar drinking, suggesting that drink had contributed to the scurvy outbreak and was a poor supply to take on an expedition. The idea that alcohol had warming, cheering, and sleep-inducing effects had come under scrutiny from a variety of perspectives. At the same time, there were some points of agreement between the two sides, particularly on the inadvisability of drink while working—a point which demonstrates the influence of Parkes on medical views of alcohol. However, even many medics less opposed to moderate evening drinking conceded that the space devoted to alcohol should have been given over to more wholesome supplies such as lime juice. By linking alcohol and poor health, the report encouraged future expeditions to avoid taking heavy drinkers and encouraged explorers to abstain from alcohol while

⁶² Anon., “The Arctic Expedition and Its Temperance Moral,” 60.

⁶³ Anon., “Scurvy,” *BMJ*, January 18, 1879, 91–92.

travelling. If an expedition failed to do so and then suffered from an outbreak of scurvy, it would be vulnerable to accusations that the disease reflected its members' behaviors rather than the inevitable strains of polar travel.

Temperance, exploration, and health on the British National Antarctic Expedition

The changing attitudes towards expeditionary drinking are evident in the approach to alcohol on the British National Antarctic Expedition (BNAE, 1901–4). The expedition, led by Robert Falcon Scott, a naval commander and the son of a brewery owner, travelled to Antarctica on a purpose-built ship, *Discovery*, in 1901. Organized by the Royal Society (RS) and the Royal Geographical Society (RGS), and part-funded by the government, the BNAE was tasked with an ambitious program of geographical exploration and scientific fieldwork. It is widely heralded as one of the opening acts in the “heroic age” of Antarctic exploration—a series of European expeditions to Antarctica in the run up to the First World War.⁶⁴

Like the BAE, the BNAE was organized along naval lines; yet its approach to drinking differed in several respects. The expedition was discouraged from the regular use of alcohol in the specially produced advice book issued to the expedition, *The Antarctic Manual* (1901). The book was commissioned by the two scientific societies and edited by the keeper of botany at the British Museum, George Murray. Most of the contributions

⁶⁴ For a wider history of the expedition see Tim H. Baughman, *Pilgrims on the Ice: Robert Falcon Scott's First Antarctic Expedition*, (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 1999).

were written by scientists, addressing the research the expedition was to carry out; one chapter, written by the Irish Arctic explorer and naval admiral Leopold McClintock, contained advice on polar sledging travelling. He advised that polar travelers would generally be “better off without” rum, except on “special occasions when a stimulant is desirable ... as an equal weight of some nutritious food might then be carried instead of it.”⁶⁵

Once in Antarctica, Scott was influenced by this advice but sought to balance it with naval tradition. He did not issue any regular alcohol ration on sledge journeys. Instead, the explorers enjoyed hot drinks, both tea and cocoa, with their meals.⁶⁶ Rum was still issued to the sailors on board the ship but out of deference to naval custom rather than because it was thought it to have any positive effects.⁶⁷ Actually, the expedition was far from a teetotal affair. When the *Discovery* travelled to Antarctica in 1901, it carried a half hogshead (27 gallons) each of brandy and whisky, 60 cases of port, as well as quantities of sherry, champagne, beer, and rum. Much of the expedition’s alcohol—including brandy,

⁶⁵ Francis L. McClintock, “Arctic Sledge-Travelling” in George Murray ed. *The Antarctic Manual for the Use of the Expedition of 1901*, (Royal Geographical Society: London, 1901), 295–304, at 297.

⁶⁶ Edward Wilson, “The Medical Aspect of the Discovery's Voyage to the Antarctic,” *BMJ* July 8, 1905, 77–80, at 77.

⁶⁷ Robert Falcon Scott, *The Voyage of the “Discovery,”* (1905, Wordsworth: London, 2009), 208.

whisky, port, and champagne—was included in its lists of “medical comforts.”⁶⁸ In part, the total quantity taken may have been influenced by the fact several suppliers donated alcohol to the expedition in order to help advertise their products.⁶⁹ Once in Antarctica, alcohol was used in emergency medical interventions—as a stimulant to help those dealing with the effects of shock and exposure. For instance, Scott notes how when one of the expedition members fell into the sea, his “teeth were chattering and hot cocoa or grog was felt to be very desirable.”⁷⁰ Likewise, a small quantity of brandy was taken on the sledging journeys but only for use in case of “emergency.” Here, brandy was used as it was widely considered a specifically medicinal drink, helping to distinguish medical drinking from the more dubious rum ration.⁷¹

Much of the other “medicinal” alcohol ended up being used for different purposes. Alcohol was used to mark special occasions, particularly during the winters spent on

⁶⁸ Anon., “Food List for 3 Years and 46 men (typed copy),” AA/6/2/6, Royal Geographical Society, f. VII. On medical comforts see Henry Guly, “Medical Comforts during the Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration,” *Polar Record*, 49 (April 2013), 110–117.

⁶⁹ Henry Guly, “Use and Abuse of Alcohol and other Drugs during the Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration,” *History of Psychiatry* 24, no. 1 (2012), 94–105, at 96.

⁷⁰ Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, 124.

⁷¹ Wilson, “The Medical Aspect of the Discovery’s Voyage to the Antarctic,” 77; Henry Guly, “Medicinal Brandy,” *Resuscitation* 82 (July 2011), 951–954.

Discovery.⁷² On midwinters' day 1902, Scott reports that an extra tot of grog was served to the sailors; however, photographs taken of the dinner that evening also show beer bottles on the table. Meanwhile, the officers drank champagne, port, and liqueurs.⁷³ In this instance, alcohol was seen to benefit the body of men, functioning to stimulate the expedition's *esprit de corps* and to reward its collective endeavor.

The organization of the expedition also reflected the findings of the Admiralty Committee's report about the selection of expedition members. During the selection process, the expedition's officers and scientific staff were interviewed on their drinking habits and their answers recorded.⁷⁴ Heavy-drinking officers would have been as more

⁷² Food was also used for morale boosting purposes on Antarctic Expeditions. See Bernadette Hince, "'Seal Liver and Onion for Dinner:' The Role of Food in Preserving the Peace on some early Antarctic Expeditions," *The Polar Journal* 4, no. 2 (2014), 377–388; Jason C. Anthony, *Hoosh: Roast Penguin, Scurvy Day, and other Stories of Antarctic Cuisine*, (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 2012).

⁷³ Scott, *The Voyage of the "Discovery,"* 239–240. For photo of the dinner see Antarctic "Xmas Dinner, Portside Crew," P83/6/1/1/77, Scott Polar Research Institute Photograph Collection, University of Cambridge.

⁷⁴ Anon., "Average Consumption of Alcoholic Beverages," (undated), National Antarctic Expedition Collection [hereafter NAE], AA3/2/11, Royal Geographical Society [hereafter RGS]. The record is filed amongst documents on the "choice of commander and officers," suggesting the interview formed part of the selection process.

likely to succumb to scurvy and, perhaps, also lacking the discipline required of a successful polar explorer. It remains unclear with whom the results of these interviews were shared and whether they did, in fact, shape who was selected. What's more, we cannot necessarily take the responses as an accurate representation of the real drinking habits of these men.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, the answers underline the significance attached to drinking habits by the expedition's organizers and offer an insight into what levels of alcohol consumption were considered socially acceptable by a group of would-be polar explorers at the turn of the twentieth century. Most reported that they only drank in moderation. Reginald Skelton, the expedition's engineer, claimed he practiced only "[v]ery moderate consumption" and that he had "no particular choice" in terms of drink. The expedition's marine biologist, Thomas Hodgson, reported that he drank only rarely. Similarly, William Shackleton—who did not end up going to Antarctica for unrelated reasons—claimed that he did not "take either wines or spirits except dinner Claret [*sic*]."⁷⁶ Others preferred to drink small quantities of spirits. Michael Barne, who became the

⁷⁵ As has been well documented, people interviewed about their alcohol consumption frequently lie or misrepresent their true intake. See Sadie Boniface, James Kneale and Nicola Shelton, "Drinking Pattern is more strongly Associated with Under-Reporting of Alcohol Consumption than Socio-Demographic Factors: Evidence from a Mixed-Methods Study," *BMC Public Health*, 14 (2014), 1297.

⁷⁶ Not to be confused with Sir Ernest Shackleton who also went on the expedition but did not take part in the survey as he was appointed later.

expedition's second lieutenant, said that he drank "[o]ne glass of spirits a day." Likewise, the expedition's surgeon, Reginald Koettlitz, reported that he drank a "[s]mall quantity of whisky once daily." Only one would-be explorer showed any real enthusiasm for drink: Charles Royds, the expedition's meteorologist, who claimed he could "drink anything, Port, claret, whisky, & beer being the most usual of my beverages, also burgundy at times."⁷⁷ Support for moderate drinking was not universal: the expedition's junior surgeon and zoologist, Edward Wilson, reported that his consumption of alcohol was none "unless required as medicine for a short period." Attitudes to drinking were clearly divided between the moderate drinkers and Wilson, the abstainer, but almost all emphasized that they did not drink excessively.

The same questions were not asked of sailors selected for the expedition, perhaps reflecting differing expectations about their drinking patterns given that the naval rum ration was still standard practice. The sailors were, however, examined medically, and asked about their health and hobbies, and references were taken up to assess their character.⁷⁸ Playing a musical instrument was looked upon positively by the selecting medics because it would provide entertainment throughout the polar winter. This idea

⁷⁷ Anon., "Average consumption of alcoholic beverages," AA3/2/11, RGS.

⁷⁸ For records of crew selection see, "Crew," NAE Collection, AA/3/4/1–48, RGS.

echoed the views of some temperance campaigners who suggested that music would help distract working-class men from the vice of drink.⁷⁹

The organizers of the BNAE—Scott and the scientific societies—approached alcohol differently than the leaders of the BAE. Rum was not taken sledging, the sailors' rum ration was tolerated rather than encouraged while on board ship, and alcohol was no longer seen as a useful aid to sleep. Although many officers and men drank, it was no longer presented as something that would help explorers to cope with the strains of polar sledging. As on the BAE, attitudes to drinking were not monolithic, and the expedition included both drinkers and abstainers.

Pro-abstinence rhetoric and its limits

The other major difference between the BAE and the BNAE was in how drinking was presented to the outside world. Scott wrote about the expedition's drinking habits in his account of the expedition, *The Voyage of the "Discovery"* (1905) and he presented a picture of sobriety and suggested the explorers, particularly the officers, had little taste for alcohol. These descriptions were not necessarily accurate and were shaped by a need to manage news around a scurvy outbreak and by the reduced acceptability of drinking in an increasingly professionalized navy. In his approach, Scott was not uniquely, or even particularly, dishonest. Rather, the editing of travel narratives to remove or recast incidents

⁷⁹ Terry Coleman, *The Railway Navvies: A History of the Men Who Made the Railways*, (London: Pimlico, 2000), 184.

that would cast doubt on an explorers' reputation was standard practice throughout the nineteenth century.⁸⁰ Instead, I use Scott's writings to highlight how, in the aftermath of the BAE, practices of expeditionary drinking had now become a reputational issue for explorers in a way that they had not been before, and now required careful rhetorical management.

Scott's descriptions of drinking habits were divided along class lines, and he often adopted paternalistic and somewhat patronizing language when discussing the sailors. Regarding the rum ration, Scott reported that he was "not at all sure the men would not be better without it" but chose not to act on that feeling out of a concern that the sailors would feel "aggrieved" if the ration were stopped.⁸¹ Scott claimed that abstention would be good for the sailors but suggests that most would not practice it without outside compulsion. For instance, in 1904, Scott led a party of officers and sailors to try to free the ice-bound *Discovery* by cutting a passage through the sea-ice. During this venture, the men were not issued a rum ration, as it had been left behind on the ship. Scott reported that the men's "health and spirits" were "overflowing" and that the camp was "a good advertisement for teetotallers, as there is no grog, and our strongest drinks are tea and cocoa." Scott attributed

⁸⁰ On this point, see Dane Kennedy, *The Last Blank Spaces: Exploring Africa and Australia*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 195–260; Innes M. Keighren, Charles W.J. Withers, and Bill Bell, *Travels into Print: Exploration, Writing, and Publishing with John Murray, 1773-1859*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2015).

⁸¹ Scott, *The Voyage of the "Discovery,"* 208.

the atmosphere of the camp to the combination of abstention with “the outdoor life with hard work and good food.”⁸² Whereas on the BAE, officers often presented rum as cheering, Scott argued the men were happier and healthier without it. On one level, Antarctica provides the model for a healthy, happy life, with no alcohol and lots of exercise. On another level, the situation highlights how Scott could only enforce sobriety on the sailors under somewhat extreme and artificial conditions.

Despite suggesting the sailors liked to drink more than they should, Scott generally avoids describing incidents of drunkenness or disorder on the expedition, implying that he was able to restrain the sailors from overindulgences. One sailor does, however, stand out from the crowd: William Lashley, a working-class stoker who accompanied Scott on his longest overland sledge journey. Scott reported that Lashley was “a teetotaller and non-smoker all this life” and Scott suggests that he was consequently “never in anything but the hardest condition.”⁸³ By linking Lashley’s physical strength—a much-coveted quality for an Edwardian man—with his temperance, Scott held that abstention gave him a physical advantage over his non-drinking companions.⁸⁴ These descriptions contrast strongly with Nares’s argument that abstainers and drinkers performed equally well on the BAE.

⁸² Scott, *Voyage of the “Discovery,”* 581.

⁸³ Scott, *Voyage of the “Discovery,”* 545.

⁸⁴ Christopher E. Forth, *Masculinity in the Modern West: Gender, Civilization and the Body*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Donald E. Hall, ed., *Muscular*

In contrast to the sailors, Scott presented the officers as self-controlled and as able to regulate their own drinking habits. When describing dinners on the ship during the polar winter, Scott claims that “[f]ew of us drink any alcohol, except possibly an occasional glass of wine after dinner, or a small bottle of beer on Sunday with our mutton ... the total consumption of alcoholic drink is ridiculously small ... no-one seems to have any appetite for it.” Indeed, Scott tries to claim the wardroom was a largely “abstemious community” and notes that some of the officers are “practically teetotallers.”⁸⁵ Scott, then, is keen to highlight the self-directed restraint of the expedition’s officers and scientific staff.

The expedition’s junior surgeon, Edward Wilson, also stressed how little the explorers had drunk in an article he wrote on the expedition for the *BMJ*. Wilson claimed that while the officers had plenty of alcohol available, “very little was used; the taste for alcoholic drinks [having] dropped suddenly on our entry into the ice some months before the winter set in, and this disinclination increased as time went on.”⁸⁶ Likewise, the expedition’s surgeon, Koettlitz, claimed that while “[t]he men had their ordinary rum ration served out to them, the officers did not take any alcohol for weeks at a time.”⁸⁷ Again, the

Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age, (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2003).

⁸⁵ Scott, *Voyage of the “Discovery,”* 212.

⁸⁶ Edward Wilson, “The Medical Aspect of the *Discovery’s* Voyage to the Antarctic,” 77

⁸⁷ Koettlitz quoted in Guly, “Use and abuse of alcohol and other drugs during the heroic age of Antarctic exploration,” 98.

officers are presented as sober and self-controlled. Such statements show a clear rhetorical difference from officers' descriptions of drinking on the BAE. Before, officers and medics spoke positively about the sensation of drinking alcohol; however, on the BNAE they attempted to dissociate themselves from the enjoyment of even moderate drinking.

These public statements were not necessarily accurate, and private records show several unreported incidents of drunkenness amongst officers, scientists and sailors.⁸⁸ During the crossing-the-line ceremony—a carnivalesque celebration to mark crossing the equator on the way to Antarctica—many of the sailors got drunk, so much so that Wilson reported in his diary that there were “[s]ome total collapses in the men’s mess.” Wilson also noted that “[t]he men have a way of saving up their rum tots in a bottle till [*sic*] they have enough to get really drunk, and then they do!”⁸⁹ Perhaps it was practices such as this that caused Scott to feel the sailors would be better off without the rum ration.

Alcohol was even linked to one death: a sailor fell from the mast as the *Discovery* left New Zealand in 1901—an incident that was covered up. The expedition’s chief engineer, Reginald Skelton, wrote in his diary that the incident was “an object lesson to the men who have been drinking too much. He was...the worse for liquor when he went up

⁸⁸Below, I have drawn from Guly, “Use and Abuse of Alcohol and Other Drugs during the Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration,” 99–102.

⁸⁹ Edward Wilson, *Diary of the Discovery Expedition 1901–4*, edited from the original manuscript by Ann Savour, (New York: Humanities Press, 1966), 44.

[the mast].”⁹⁰ Skelton also notes that death was reported as “accidental” and that the records said “[n]othing about the man being drunk or having a bottle at the masthead.”⁹¹ Indeed, the fact Scott covered up this incident highlights the problem with taking his proclamations about temperance and sobriety at face value; he was always conscious about how the expedition might be perceived by external audiences and sought to manage its reputation in various ways.

Excessive drinking was not confined to the sailors. On 5 December 1901, Wilson, the expedition’s junior surgeon—who claimed to drink no alcohol except for medicinal purposes—reported waking up with “a splitting headache, the result of drinking bad wine in large quantities” at the wardroom dinner table.⁹² Likewise, after midwinter’s day celebrations 1903, Thomas Hodgson, the expedition’s biologist, noted that Scott had been “quite as much excited as was necessary for his dignity.”⁹³ The officers certainly seem to have enjoyed drinking far more than they professed in public. Lieutenant Royds reports in his diary numerous instances where the officers celebrated minor events—such as wedding anniversaries—with several glasses of wines, liqueurs, or champagne at the wardroom

⁹⁰ Judy Skelton (ed.), *The Antarctic Journals of Reginald Skelton: “Another Little Job for the Tinker,”* (Cheltenham: Reardon Publishing 2004), 33.

⁹¹ Skelton, *The Antarctic Journals*, 33.

⁹² Wilson, *Diary of the Discovery Expedition*, 83.

⁹³ Elspeth Huxley, *Scott of the Antarctic*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977), 76.

dinner table.⁹⁴ These records suggest that the expedition was not quite the abstemious community presented in Scott's account.

Scott's attempts to stress the expedition's restrained drinking habits were a product of the fact that, like the BAE, the BNAE suffered an outbreak of scurvy. On the BNAE, this outbreak was less severe than the BAE's and did not prove fatal. Scurvy first appeared towards the end of the expedition's first winter in Antarctica, amongst both officers and men. After apparently abating, scurvy then re-appeared during some of the southern sledging journeys. One outbreak on Scott's southern journey was particularly serious, cutting the trek short and threatening the life of the expedition's third lieutenant, Ernest Shackleton. Given contemporary understandings of scurvy and the links between the disease and alcoholism, this outbreak posed a significant threat to the reputation of the expedition, considering scurvy was an avoidable and ostensibly shameful ailment, linked to carelessness, neglect, and alcoholism.⁹⁵ Shortly after news of scurvy on the expedition broke, *The Daily Mail* questioned why the expedition had spent so much money on luxury

⁹⁴ See, for instance, T. Roger Royds, *The Diary of Lieutenant Charles W. R. Royds RN Expedition to the Antarctic, 1901–1904*, (self-published: Braidwood, 2001), 150, 206, 235, 253.

⁹⁵ For a detailed discussion about the response to scurvy on the expedition see Armston-Sheret, "Scurvy, bad food, and the reputation of the British National Antarctic Expedition, 1901–1904."

provisions such as champagne, port, and brandy.⁹⁶ Stressing the party's relative sobriety was, therefore, important in reducing the reputational danger presented by the scurvy outbreak and quashing suggestions that too much money had been spent on unhealthy luxuries—a crucial point given the expedition had received public funds. The efforts of Scott and Wilson to downplay the expedition's alcohol consumption thus reflect how, by the early twentieth century, practices of drinking were potentially a make-or-break issue for a polar explorer, particularly in the face of a scurvy outbreak.

Scurvy and economy were not the only factors that shaped representations of drinking. Scott's statements also reflect the fact that decreased acceptability of drinking in an increasingly professionalized navy and changing understandings of naval heroism. By the early twentieth century, the sober, masculine and heroic naval hero had become an important figure within British culture—an image that relied on casting off images of drunken sailors.⁹⁷ This angle should not be discounted, as Scott certainly saw the expedition as a means to advance his public profile and naval career and reporting incidents where the expedition members had enjoyed drinking would have done little to help him on either front.⁹⁸

Drinking on the BNAE was represented to domestic audiences very differently than on the BAE. While many officers on the BAE talked about alcohol in positive terms, both

⁹⁶ Anon., "Polar Extravagance" *The Daily Mail*, May 29, 1903, 5.

⁹⁷ Conley, *From Jack Tar to Union Jack*.

⁹⁸ Huxley, *Scott of the Antarctic*, 126.

Scott and Wilson emphasized that the officers and scientists derived little enjoyment from even moderate drinking. Indeed, Scott downplayed (and, at one point, covered up) incidents of drunkenness in his published account. These editing efforts underscore how alcohol had become a reputation issue for a polar explorer, requiring careful rhetorical management—particularly on an expedition that faced a scurvy outbreak.

Conclusion

When Scott returned to Antarctic in 1911 on his ill-fated *Terra Nova* expedition, Aspley Cherry Garrard, the expedition's assistant zoologist, claimed that "the general medical opinion of the expedition" considered the presence of alcohol "undesirable." As the expedition was a civilian undertaking that overwintered in a hut rather than a ship—meaning a rum ration was no longer issued—far less alcohol was taken south. Even so, many explorers still relished a drink. Cherry Garrard reported that a small quantity of medical brandy was carried on sledge journeys and that "[a]ny officer who allowed the distribution of this luxury nearing the end of a journey became extremely popular."⁹⁹

In many ways, Chery Garrard's comments summarize the wider changes that had taken place in attitudes towards polar drinking over the course of the long nineteenth century. Medical opinion had shifted away from viewing alcohol as a useful supply in cold

⁹⁹ The smaller size of the expedition's ship also meant less alcohol could be taken. Aspley Cherry Garrard, *The Worst Journey in the World*, (London: Constable and Company, 1922) 197.

climates. When alcohol was drunk, its consumption was less often justified in medicinal terms: Cherry Garrard talks about brandy as a “luxury,” not a medicalized aid to sleep or essential stimulant as earlier medics and explorers claimed. Even so, changing medical views of alcohol did not stop polar explorers from drinking, sometimes to excess. Such incidents highlight the limits of medical temperance ideas as a means to promote abstinence. Medics who opposed drinking did much to demonstrate that alcohol was harmful in a cold climate, but this failed to stop many explorers from drinking—even if they thought it unhealthy. Of course, the other change was in how alcohol was written about by British explorers. Given the links between scurvy and alcoholism, alcohol was increasingly seen as a reputational issue for expedition leaders—particularly on expeditions where there had been an outbreak of the disease. And this meant that the leadership of the BNAE approached alcohol very differently from the BAE. Not only did Scott restrict the BNAE’s alcohol intake, he also tried—through omitting incidents of drunkenness—to downplay the expedition’s consumption to domestic audiences.

In some senses, the changing approach to drink on polar expeditions reflects broader shifts in attitudes towards alcohol in Britain, particularly alcohol’s move from being an ordinary part of diet to being regarded as an unhealthy luxury or a poison. Indeed, both expeditions contained abstainers, testifying to the influence of temperance ideas. Yet, polar drinking did not just reflect medical debates about alcohol, it also shaped them. In the mid nineteenth century, polar exploration was a source of evidence about the effects of alcohol upon the body. Explorers thus reflected, shaped, and spread debates about the health effects of alcohol, meaning the study of expeditionary drinking practices provides

broader insights into changing attitudes to drink and temperance.¹⁰⁰ Even when operating at a geographical distance from Britain—often literally at the ends of the earth—polar explorers had an important role in directing the course of discussions over the uses and dangers of alcohol.

¹⁰⁰ In this paper, I have focused on how these discussions played out on British naval expeditions. There is, however, scope for examining how practices of drinking changed on polar expeditions from other countries with temperance movements and changing approaches to drink on expeditions to other environments.