

Book Reviews

RESURRECTING DR. MOSS. THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF A ROYAL NAVY SURGEON. EDWARD LAWTON MOSS MD, RN, 1843–1880. Paul E. Appleton. William Barr (editor). 2008. Calgary: University of Calgary Press. xvi + 252 p, illustrated, Soft cover. ISBN 978-1-55238-232-5. US\$42.95.
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To the polar enthusiast, Edward Lawton Moss is known as one of the naval surgeons on Nares' British Arctic Expedition 1875–1876. He was not the senior surgeon but is well known because of his book *Shores of the Polar Sea* (which, incidentally, has been digitalised and is available for anyone to read via the internet). Not surprisingly, the expedition, a disaster because of the outbreak of scurvy, and the enquiries afterwards are well described and although we learn nothing new about that expedition, the book is valuable for other reasons.

It describes the life and career of Dr Moss, based mainly on his letters. Trained in Dublin and St. Andrew's, he qualified as a doctor in 1862 at the age of 20 and went to America for two years before returning and joining the Royal Navy in 1864. A week later he was sailing for the West Indies on board HMS *Bulldog* where he came under fire and his ship was lost, in a little known episode of gunboat diplomacy in Haiti. From there he served on a troopship for four years ferrying troops between garrisons and to some of the minor wars of the time. He then had a long period ashore in charge of small naval hospitals in Portland and Esquimalt, British Columbia. He was recalled to go to the Arctic where, apart from his medical duties, he commanded a sledging party and afterwards he served on the battleship HMS *Research* in the Eastern Mediterranean where

he visited, and assisted in, the excavations of, what was believed to be ancient Troy. His next posting was to HMS *Atalanta*, a training ship, on a voyage to the West Indies and he died at the young age of 37 when the ship disappeared in 1880 on its return journey.

Moss was clearly an interesting character and very talented: an author, an artist (a number of his paintings are reproduced in this book) and a naturalist and all this is well described but, to me, the main value of the book is in describing the ordinariness of his naval career. There is much written about naval surgeons serving on expeditions, managing scurvy and dealing with battle wounded casualties and Moss did all of these things. But in between these highlights, there was routine sailing and service ashore running hospitals and dealing with tuberculosis, smallpox, venereal disease and rheumatism. There are career decisions to be taken such as which postings are likely to mean promotion and a salary increase. A reasonable spell ashore gives an opportunity to get married but marriage means having to balance career and family life. Beneath all that is a person with his interests and religious beliefs and doubts. All of these are beautifully described in this attractively produced book.

This book can be recommended, not just for describing the Nares Expedition and the life of Dr Moss. While every naval surgeon's career was unique, the context in which their careers developed was the same. The Royal Navy was a major force in polar exploration, both north and south, and many of the medical officers who served on these expeditions have also been highly talented and this book will help to describe the context of their careers as well. (Henry Guly. Department of Emergency Medicine, Derriford Hospital, Plymouth PL6 8DH and British Antarctic Survey Medical Unit).

NIMROD ILLUSTRATED: PICTURES FROM LIEUTENANT SHACKLETON'S BRITISH ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION. D.M. Wilson. 2009. Cheltenham: Reardon Publishing. 168 p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 978-1-8738-7790-6. £39.99.
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In the past decade, David Wilson has helped to bring alive the Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration in a manner both delightful and extremely valuable. The lavishly illustrated books that he has co-authored, and for which he pulled together vast numbers of original photographs and other noteworthy artwork (Wilson and Elder 2000; Skelton and Wilson 2001; Wilson and Wilson 2004), have allowed an excellent insight into the explorers, their work, the conditions they faced, and what life was like in the Antarctic – both at base and in the field – a century or more ago. Certainly there have been other photograph treatments of Antarctic exploration, and the remarkable abilities of Frank Hurley and Herbert Ponting have been highlighted numerous times. But Wilson has developed projects that have seen beyond

the talents of that famous pair. His books have featured the photography and artwork from expeditions and individuals that have perhaps not received the attention that their artistic results suggest they should have.

Wilson's latest volume, *Nimrod Illustrated*, celebrates another expedition that has tended to be overlooked by all but the true polar aficionados. Ernest Shackleton's British Antarctic Expedition (BAE) of 1907–09 has paled in comparison to his later Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition in the number of times its story has been retold in books, film, and the press, and in the fascination held for it by the public. However, it was the BAE – the first expedition that he led – on which Shackleton achieved his most significant geographical feats, made his most momentous decisions, and accomplished some of his greatest deeds.

It was on this expedition that, sailing in the tiny former sealer *Nimrod* and then wintering in a small hut at Cape Royds on Ross Island, Shackleton and his men conducted a series of operations that resulted in them not only obtaining an impressive wealth of scientific data but recording three major geographical