

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.
doi:10.1017/S0032247409990295

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

accomplishments. The first of these occurred in March 1908, when, immediately after setting up their base, a party of six Antarctic novices left to make the first ascent of the active volcano Mount Erebus (with five actually reaching the summit). The next October – after the long, dark winter – a pair of small parties set out on two of the most remarkable journeys in Antarctic history, either of which would have established the expedition as one of the most successful exploratory efforts ever in the far south.

The Northern Party – consisting of the famous Australian geologist T.W. Edgeworth David, his protégé Douglas Mawson, and the Scottish surgeon Alistair Mackay – man-hauled more than 1250 miles (counting relaying) along the coastal ice of Victoria Land, across the Nordenskjöld and Drygalski Ice Barriers, up a heavily crevassed series of glaciers to the Antarctic Plateau, and then across that barren plain, to become the first men to reach the vicinity of the South Magnetic Pole. Meanwhile, the Southern Party of Shackleton, second-in-command Jameson Adams, surgeon Eric Marshall, and Frank Wild – accompanied initially by four Manchurian ponies – headed towards the southernmost place on Earth. They crossed the Great Ice Barrier, discovered and ascended the Beardmore Glacier, and continued across the heart of the Antarctic Plateau until, running out of food, they had to turn back when only 97 geographical miles from the South Pole. Like the Northern Party, they somehow overcame all the obstacles that promised disaster on the way back, and managed – pushed by the indomitable will of Shackleton – to arrive back just in time to catch *Nimrod* before she abandoned them and sailed north.

This reviewer's own work, *Nimrod* (Riffenburgh 2004), was the first book in almost a century (since Shackleton's *The heart of the Antarctic* in 1909) to tell the full tale of the BAE, from its haphazard organisation to its incredible feats of endurance. But Wilson's new book brings a whole new dimension to the story by compiling a stunning set of photographs detailing every aspect of the expedition, from when *Nimrod* first sailed up the Thames for an overhaul that would make her sea- and ice-worthy, until, suddenly world-famous, she returned to England to serve as a floating exhibition highlighting one of the greatest adventures of the era. In between, accompanied by a succinct but thorough text,

is a feast of photography and artwork that adds immeasurably to the understanding of many aspects of the expedition: the voyage to the south, the establishment of the base, the ascent of Erebus, the confined winter, and the struggles and triumphs of the sledging parties.

Some readers will be familiar with a number of the photographs – a large selection coming, of course, from the picture library of the Scott Polar Research Institute. But many of the images have never been published before, Wilson having painstakingly tracked down numerous photos, sketches, paintings, and maps from different archives or from the descendants of the members of the expedition. Not the least significant of these are a series of full-colour paintings by George Marston, the expedition artist, showing, amongst other things, *Nimrod* exploring in the ice, scenes from Cape Royds, and the beauty and mystery of the Antarctic winter. Wilson also spent many laborious hours identifying photos and illustrations that either had no information supplied with them or, when there was more than one copy, had conflicting information; this was a scholarly contribution that is much appreciated.

Both Wilson and his long-time publisher, Nick Reardon, should be congratulated on such an informative, well-produced book. It is a valuable and greatly enjoyable addition to the literature about the exploration of the Antarctic, and should find a place on the bookshelf of every polar enthusiast. (Beau Riffenburgh, Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Lensfield Road, Cambridge CB2 1ER.)

References

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GEODYNAMIC EVOLUTION OF EAST ANTARCTICA: A KEY TO EAST-WEST GONDWANA CONNECTION. M. Satish-Kumar, Y. Motoyoshi, Y. Osanai, Y. Hiroi, and K. Shiraishi (Editors). 2008. London: Geological Society (Geological Society special publication 308), 464 p, illustrated, hardcover. ISBN 978-1-86239-268-7 £100. doi:10.1017/S0032247409990362

The book has 22 chapters by independent contributors. It has a seven page index and a preface. Publication of this book is a part of the Japanese contribution to International Polar Year 2007–2008. The main geographical area of interest of the book is the Neoproterozoic and Palaeozoic geology of the area of east Antarctica from 0° to 60° E extending along the coast from the Napier Complex of Enderby Land in the east, to west and central Dronning Maud land in the west, broadly centred on the Japanese Syowa station.

The book opens with a broad introduction by Satish-Kumar and others that sets the scene for the contributed chapters,

although there does not appear to be any particular way that these are laid out. The opening chapter is largely organised geographically and it would have been useful if the rest of the book had been structured along similar lines. The main scientific focus is the late Neoproterozoic to early Palaeozoic history of east Antarctica and how it reflects the events that led to the final amalgamation of east and west Gondwana, but also looking at the older Archaean and Palaeo-Mesoproterozoic rocks that were affected. Of particular importance is the relatively recent discovery of the Lutzow-Holm Bay early Cambrian mobile belt. This preserves considerable detail from the time of final Gondwana amalgamation and marks a move away from stabilist, cratonic interpretations of east Antarctic evolution in the post-Mesoproterozoic. As the authors point out, Antarctica is in a unique position globally in that it has very little subducting margin and has been tectonically isolated largely since the Mesozoic. This has kept much detail of earlier orogenic events in, as they describe it, a kind of tectonic 'cold storage' without subsequent overprint.