



Limeys: The Conquest of Scurvy

David I. Harvie

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In 1740, Commodore George Anson left Portsmouth with seven ships and nearly 2,000 men. He returned four years later with under 600. Only four were killed by the enemy; the rest died not as the result of war, weather or misnavigation, but of scurvy. Limeys is the dramatic history of Dr. James Lind's heroic efforts to find a cure for this 'dreaded disease' in the face of the corrosive patronage and establishment antipathy of the times.

In the three centuries prior to 1800, it has been estimated that scurvy killed at least two million sailors. It was characterised by rotting gums, foetid breath, swelling limbs, malaise and hemorrhaging. Desperate men took any 'cure' offered - urine mouthwashes, sulphuric acid, bloodletting, even burial up to the neck in sand. Most died.

In 1747 Lind, a Scottish Naval Surgeon, conducted the first practical medical research to find a cure. He recommended lemons, oranges and their juice. Yet he was unable to penetrate the Admiralty high-mindedness, or to persuade them to enforce the fruits' universal application. Only in 1795, when court physician Gilbert Blane championed Lind's work, were the Sea Lords persuaded to act. But by then, James Lind had been dead for a year and thousands had needlessly perished.

From sailors, citrus fruits and 'Limeys' to the birth of Rose's Lime Juice Cordial, the world's first soft drink, this book tells the extraordinary, graphic and compelling story of the epic quest to conquer one of mankind's most terrible diseases.

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