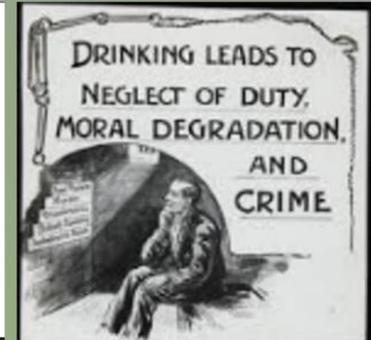
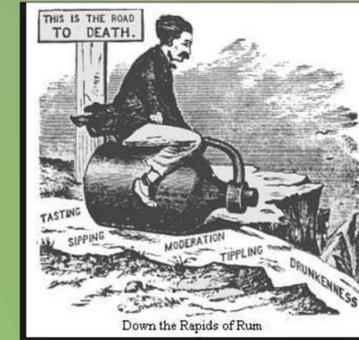


# Decrying Drunkenness in Devonport

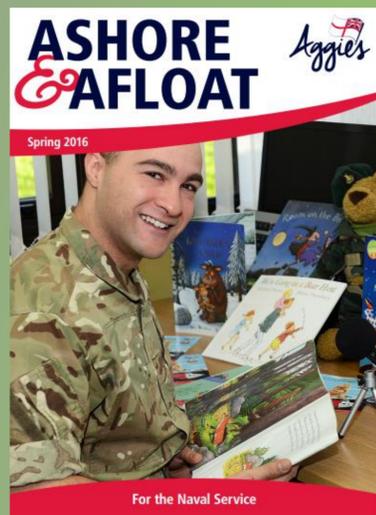
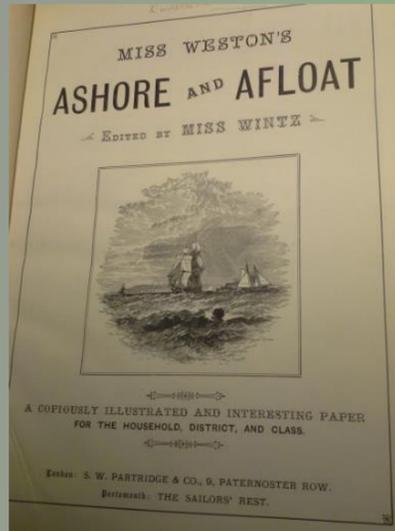


Dame Aggie Weston, 'The Sailors Friend', founded the Devonport Seaman's Mission and the first Royal Sailors Rest in 1876 next to the Dockyard gates replicating similar Christian rest homes she had set up in Portsmouth. 127,000 servicemen visited the rest in its first year of operation and 10,488 spent a night there. She was an active member of the National Temperance League and campaigned tirelessly to improve the conditions and situations of sailors and their families advocating teetotalism as the only saviour from degeneration. Plymouth and Stonehouse had led the way establishing the first seaman's rest in the Three Towns in November 1820. In 1887 she became the President of the Plymouth, Stonehouse and Devonport Ladies Temperance Association.

By a recent regulation issued by the Admiralty, no person belonging to the Dock-yard is to keep or have an interest in a public house or beershop; and those who may be so circumstanced, are either to give up the same or leave the yard forthwith. *Royal Cornwall Gazette*, 6 September 1834\*



Images from *Ashore and Afloat*\*



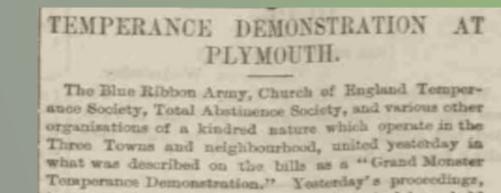
While many of Plymouth's prominent citizens tended towards absolute teetotalism banning all alcohol, Devonport adopted a more relaxed approach because of its naval presence and the need for frustrated sailors to 'let their hair down' and have a few beers. Temperancers like Aggie sought to limit the consumption of beer because of the effects of drunkenness in causing domestic and street violence. She conveyed strong moral messages in her temperance magazine, *Ashore and Afloat*\* which is still published today though it is significantly less judgemental than its 1885 equivalent. Sub-titled A Copiously Illustrated and Interesting Paper for the Household, District and Class it would have sparked cynical interest amongst many of its intended readership with its judgemental stance about the real life dangers and consequences of drink, and explicit and implicit reprimands that there was no other alternative but Christian indoctrinated teetotalism.



Headlines like these were not unusual. Inquests on death by alcohol poisoning were not uncommon as in this example of Charles Flood, a 32 year old labourer. Mr Wilson who conducted the post-mortem examination said his liver was 'hobnailed' from drink. The Coroner pronounced the verdict of death by heart disease 'accelerated by heavy drinking.' These were exactly the kind of individuals that Aggie hoped to save. *Western Weekly News*, 4 July 1893\*



Isaac Foot (father of the Isaac Foot Liberal MP and grandfather of Michael Foot MP) was a passionate Methodist and Teetotaler who helped create the Band of Hope at Devonport encouraging 250 young naval apprentices and 116 locals to sign the pledge of total abstinence in 1885 *Western Weekly News* 22 Aug 1885\*.



The 'Grand Monster Temperance Demonstration': in September 1887 The Blue Ribband Army, Church of England Temperance Society, Total Abstinence Society, Ladies Temperance Association and 'other kindred organisations' across the Three Towns united in a procession starting at Devonport Park and along Union Street calling upon 'all good citizens ... to combine their electoral influences, so as to secure to the people in their separate localities the power to banish the liquor traffic from their midst.' *Western Morning News* 22 September 1887.\*

At Exeter Hall, the Bishop of London publicly praised 'Miss Weston and her friends' for taking, in one year, 3,952 pledges and distributing 700 cards of medals and awards to sailors and soldiers in Devonport (and Portsmouth) who had kept the pledge for between 1 and 20 years. He also noted that all ships berthed in port at Devonport at that time had a representative of the Temperance League on board *Western Daily Mercury*, 2 May 1889\*



\*Newspaper extracts (c) British Library Board



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