

“Early Seamen’s Missions in the British World”

Justine Atkinson BA(Hons)(Newcastle); MA (Newcastle)

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## STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

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## **Abstract**

In the nineteenth century seamen's missions and other seafarers' welfare organisations began to appear in ports around Britain and across the British Empire, providing spiritual support and material comforts to seafarers in the British merchant fleet. Their discourse on the merchant seafarers' condition was often couched in terms of appreciation for those "bulwarks of the nation" and the much neglected moral and physical hardships they endured. However, this growing awareness of the welfare needs of the sailor also reflected growing concern regarding his identity and place within Britain's imperial space. Sailors were recognized as essential to the transportation of commodities essential to a growing, Christian British empire, travelling both within and across its boundaries. It was therefore important to seamen's missions and their supporters that the sailor's behaviour reflected both Christian and British values, and that he continued to be a transient figure moving between settlements of empire. These concerns were amplified when translated from the ports of Britain to those in a colonial setting; including discourse on home, family and belonging, and how these relate to the sailor. The state of seamen's welfare in port became associated with a prosperous, civilised settlement, contributing to both the growth of British trade and the spread of Christian living. Interactions and rivalries could alter between various groups involved in the seamen's missionary movement, depending on how deeply institutions of imperialism had been established. This can be demonstrated by a comparative study of the movement in colonial sea-ports with varying degrees of imperial controls in place. We may also consider how the welfare of seamen and notions of their identity proved a platform for competing interests to vie for space and input into how their community was portrayed to the rest of the world.