POOLE: WHERE ROBINSON CRUSOE WAS DISCOVERED

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We visited Brownsea Island, a beautiful island that lies at the mouth of Poole Harbour, in the county of Dorset in England. Poole Harbour, by the way, is the second largest natural harbour in the world after Sydney, Australia. But I DID NOT KNOW that here at Poole Robinson Crusoe was discovered. As the story goes, in August of 1708, Woodes Roger, persuaded by William Dampier, a navigator and a friend of Roger’s father, set sail with two little ships, the Duke and the Duchess, to explore treasure and adventures in the South Sea. Commanding the two frigates, the Duke and the Duchess, and captaining the first, Rogers spent three years circumnavigating the globe. Dampier was aboard as Roger’s sailing master. Roger was aware of a disease ‘scurvy’ (the name scurvy was not known at that time) which can be prevented by consuming limes and he stocked his ship with enough limes to prevent the disease.

Thus, the disease scurvy could be cured with use of limes was known about 40 years before the discovery by James Lind who is credited for his discovery in 1747. That citrus fruits cured scurvy was demonstrated from the epidemiological studies conducted on twelve sailors on board the Salisbury. As described in the book “Foundations of Epidemiology” by A.M. Lilienfeld and D. E. Lilienfeld, Lind took 12 patients having scurvy with their conditions as similar as possible and prescribed the following: “They had one diet common to all. Two of these were ordered each a quart of cyder a day, two others took 25 gutts of elixir vitriol (sulfuric acid) for gargling ... two of the worst patients were put under a course of sea water .. Two others took two spoonfuls of vinegar thrice a day. Two others were given each two oranges a day and one lemon every day. The two remaining patients took of an electuary made of garlic, mustard seed, red raphon, balsam of Peru, and gum myrrh. The consequence was, that the most sudden and visible food effects were perceived from the use of the oranges and lemons; one of those who had taken them being at the end of six days fit for duty. The other was the best recovered of any in his condition; and being now deemed pretty well, was appointed nurse to the rest of the

* This series originates from our visit to England and the USA in the summer of 2014. This is not a travelogue, neither is it an informative document on the places that we visited. These are some of the facts which are not usually available in travel documents and which I DID NOT KNOW before this travel. I hope our readers will enjoy reading it as many of the facts may not be known to all the readers of the journal. The author may be reached at editor.scienceandculture@gmail.com

Stark similarity between the statue of Alexander Selkirk and Robinson Crusoe as portrayed by Daniel Defoe in his novel is seen in the cover of the book Robinson Crusoe.
sick”. However, this is the first scientific study to prove that citrus food cures scurvy (Vitamin C was unknown then).

Coming back to our original story of the voyage of Rogers—after reaching the Pacific Ocean, provision of limes was exhausted and seven persons died out of vitamin deficiency. Dampier somehow managed to guide the ships to a little-known island, called Juan Fernandez, to replenish supplies of fresh produce. In February 1709, as they neared the island, they were amazed to spot a fire at a distance. Roger sent a boat next morning and discovered that the fire came from a Scottish sailor Alexander Selkirk who was stranded in an isolated island there for more than four years, surviving on only what nature could provide, and praying to God for rescue.

Incidentally, Alexander Selkirk was born in Scotland in 1676 and fled at an early age for sea hopping to try his fortune through piracy against Spanish vessels off the coast of South America. He was castaway in September 1704 in an uninhabited island Mas a Tierra (now known as Robinson Crusoe island) in the South Sea 400 miles off the west coast of Chile. Recent archaeological studies confirm the evidence of the campsite of an early European occupant in the coast as described.

As noted in his journal, Rogers found Selkirk, to be ‘wild-looking’ and wearing ‘goatskins’, who had with him some clothes and bedding, a firelock, some powder, bullets, tobacco, a hatchet, a knife, a Bible and books. Roger who had grown up in Poole shared this adventurous story of Selkirk with his friends and Daniel Defoe was one of them. This story apparently inspired Daniel Defoe, to write the classic novel *Robinson Crusoe*. It is not known whether Defoe actually met Alexander Selkirk but from the similarity of appearance of Selkirk as described by Rogers with Defoe’s imagined character in the novel, it is believed that the character Robinson Crusoe was built in the backdrop of Alexander Selkirk’s adventure.