

## CHAPTER 3

# Starting up (1870-1879)

## Market conditions and the Norwegian ice export

The first few years of the 1870s marked the end of an extended upturn for Norwegian exports and the start of a long period of decline, lasting until 1887.<sup>175</sup> Norway's most important trading partners, including the UK, experienced a number of problems, like negative trends in GDP. The decline first became evident in 1874 in the coastal areas south of the capital Kristiania, which were greatly reliant on shipping and the timber and ice export trades. Timber exports decreased in value from about NOK 56 to 30 million between 1873 and the 1880s, while the value of exported fish remained stable, although the fishing industry experienced less growth or stagnated.<sup>176</sup> In the shipping sector, freight rates fell sharply after 1873 due to overcapacity, and by the 1887s,<sup>177</sup> they had virtually been halved. Ice exports fared best during this crisis, and ice was in fact the fastest growing export commodity (measured in register tons) throughout the period 1865 to 1898.<sup>178</sup>

## *Norwegian ice exports and production*

Throughout the 1870s, more than 85% of Norwegian ice exports went to the UK and Ireland, as seen in Table 3-1.

France and Germany, with 5.8% and 4.2% respectively, were the two second largest importing countries. We note that a small quantity (500 register tons) was exported to the East Indies in 1877, to what was then Rangoon (now Yangon), the largest city in Burma (now Myanmar).<sup>179</sup>

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175 Hodne & Grytten (2000), pp. 233–234.

176 Ibid.

177 Ibid.

178 Ibid, p. 275.

179 Statistics Norway. Historical statistics of external trade by country (1877); *Morgenbladet* (7 April 1878).

**Table 3-1.** Norwegian ice exports distributed by country (1870-1879)

(Register tons)

	1870	1871	1872	1873	1874	1875	1876	1877	1878	1879	Total	In %
<b>UK and Ireland</b>	58,393	75,176	103,566	124,522	117,098	118,608	137,801	162,237	167,002	126,716	<b>1,191,118</b>	<b>85.19%</b>
<b>Sweden</b>			34	25	842	21	6		120	117	<b>1,165</b>	<b>0.08%</b>
<b>Denmark</b>			508	25	3,037	237	123	36	968	171	<b>5,105</b>	<b>0.37%</b>
<b>Germany</b>			10,053	10,252	12,436	819	62	10,971	14,538	38	<b>59,169</b>	<b>4.23%</b>
<b>France</b>	462	382	1,586	16,458	7,680	5,324	2,584	19,062	20,925	7,085	<b>81,547</b>	<b>5.83%</b>
<b>The Netherlands</b>	643		9,038	964	1,554	170		7,292	6,747	576	<b>26,984</b>	<b>1.93%</b>
<b>Belgium</b>		132	4,523	947	269	172	231	8,450	6,437	2,245	<b>23,407</b>	<b>1.67%</b>
<b>Spain</b>	542	578	613	945	596	664	739	672	531	1,599	<b>7,479</b>	<b>0.53%</b>
<b>East Indies</b>								500			<b>500</b>	<b>0.04%</b>
<b>Other countries</b>							229	500	946		<b>1,675</b>	<b>0.12%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>60,039</b>	<b>76,268</b>	<b>129,921</b>	<b>154,138</b>	<b>143,512</b>	<b>126,015</b>	<b>141,775</b>	<b>209,720</b>	<b>218,214</b>	<b>138,547</b>	<b>1,398,148</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Sources: Compiled on the basis of Statistics Norway. Historical statistics of external trade by country (1870-1879).

The ice was carried as part of a speculative venture on the barque *Tordenskjold*.<sup>180</sup> During the voyage, the shipowner Andreas Salvesen assumed the role of supercargo,<sup>181</sup> responsible for the sale of the ice in Rangoon and for procuring return cargo.<sup>182</sup> Even though the ship was loaded with rice on its return voyage, the enterprise made a loss. The reason was said to be that too much ice melted during the voyage, and no more trips of this kind were made.<sup>183</sup> It nevertheless attracted considerable media attention and was reported in a number of newspapers.<sup>184</sup>

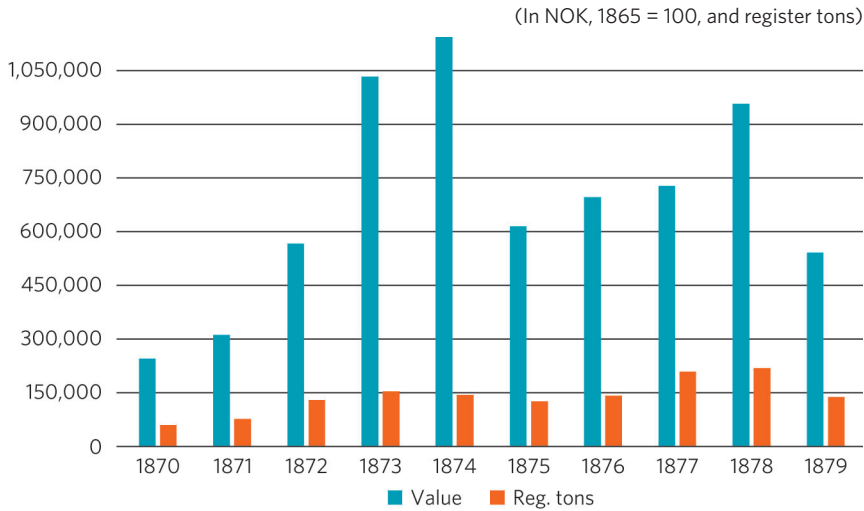
180 To be sold to the highest bidder.

181 de Kerchove (1961), p. 807. A person appointed by the owners of the cargo on a merchant ship whose task is to manage the sale or purchase of goods and to superintend all the commercial aspects of the voyage.

182 *Morgenbladet* (7 April 1878); Eirheim (2012), pp. 76-77.

183 Eirheim (2012), pp. 76-77. For more information, read about Andreas Salvesen in Eirheim (2012).

184 For example, the following newspapers: *Morgenbladet* (7 April 1878); *Grimstad Adressetidende* (10 April 1878); *Bergens Adresse-contours Efterretninger* (12 April 1878); *Bergens Tidende* (12 April 1878); *Hedemarkens Amtstidende* (12 April 1878).



**Figure 3-1.** Value and volume of Norwegian ice exports (1870–1879).

Sources: Compiled on the basis of Statistics Norway. Historical statistics of external trade (1870–1879).

Exports of ice rose throughout the 1870s (see Table 3-1), amounting to a total of 1.4 million register tons worth NOK 6.8 million. The volumes and values fluctuated from one year to the next, as evidenced in Figure 3-1. Annual variations were largely due to imbalances between ice supply and demand, in part caused by temperature changes. One such year was 1874. The winter was mild in Norway, with Kristiania recording an average temperature of  $0.2^{\circ}\text{C}$ .<sup>185</sup> It was also mild on the Continent; in Berlin, the average winter temperature was  $2.9^{\circ}\text{C}$ .<sup>186</sup> In Britain, the summer was hot, with an average July temperature in central England of  $17.3^{\circ}\text{C}$ .<sup>187</sup> The result was that demand soared but supply was limited and prices rose sharply: in 1874, the value of ice was more than double the value of three years earlier in 1871. It reached NOK 7.96 per register ton, which was the second highest value recorded in the period covered by this book (1870–1930) and was exceeded only in 1882.<sup>188</sup>

<sup>185</sup> Ouren (1991), p. 26.

<sup>186</sup> Compiled on the basis of temperature records for December, January and February, as cited in Clayton et al. (1927), p. 502.

<sup>187</sup> Beamon & Roaf (1990), p. 146; Manley (1958), p. 419.

<sup>188</sup> Compiled on the basis of Statistics Norway. Historical statistics of external trade (1870–1930).

But there were also lean years, such as 1879 when exports fell by 40% in volume and 50% in value compared to the previous year.<sup>189</sup> Falling exports to the UK accounted for half of this decline. According to the General Consul in London,<sup>190</sup> this was due to reduced private consumption caused by an ongoing recession and by the low temperatures during the winter of 1878–1879 when ‘*the ice merchants were able to collect many thousands of tons of English ice*’.<sup>191</sup> More ice was being harvested domestically on the European continent also, causing a fall in imports. In Germany, they fell from 14,538 to 38 register tons, while imports to France fell by almost 13,000 register tons,<sup>192</sup> and they continued to do so during the 1880s and early 1890s.

Overall, it was a good decade where ice exports grew, and the value of ice exports remained high throughout the period, with a value per register ton of not less than NOK 4 in any individual year, a minimum value that was not achieved in any subsequent decade.<sup>193</sup>

## T. J. Wiborg Jnr

As already mentioned, Wiborg founded his business T. J. Wiborg Jnr on 23rd February 1870. His original business idea was to operate as a ship-broker, including acting as an agent in the sale of timber and ice, and this remained the main activity throughout the 1870s.<sup>194</sup> As a broker, the company acted as an intermediary between the shipper (the ice or timber exporter) and the carrier (the shipping company that owned the ship that was to transport the ice or timber). The company received payments ranging from 2.5% to 5% of the contract sum.<sup>195</sup> T. J. Wiborg also did some

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189 Compiled on the basis of Statistics Norway. Historical statistics of external trade (1879).

190 During the period 1814–1905, Norway was in a union with Sweden. The King was Swedish and Norwegian businesses were represented by Swedish/Norwegian consulates abroad.

191 Statistics Norway. Excerpts from annual reports from the consuls of Sweden/Norway (1879). Reports on trade and shipping, p. 256.

192 *Ibid.*, pp. 35, 403; Statistics Norway. Historical statistics of external trade (1879).

193 *Ibid.*

194 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journal (1872–1891) constitutes the main source for this book’s discussion of ice production before 1890.

195 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journal (1872–1891).

export business on his own behalf, where ice or timber was bought and resold abroad.

The family timber and ice business was largely run by his father. After his father's death in 1874, the company T. J. Wiborg Jnr became responsible for some ice export activities on behalf of the deceased's estate, until it was formally wound up.<sup>196</sup> In 1874 and 1875, two of T. J. Wiborg's brothers, Ludvig and Axel Q., were also involved in T. J. Wiborg Jnr, and all three signed correspondence on behalf of the company.<sup>197</sup> The company stopped exporting timber after 1875, and from 1876 it operated exclusively as an ice export enterprise.<sup>198</sup> As from November 1876, T. J. Wiborg stopped using 'T. J. Wiborg Jnr' and changed his company's name to T. J. Wiborg.<sup>199</sup>

### *Ice transport by chartered ships: national and international aspects*

It was not until 1915 that T. J. Wiborg bought his own ships; up until then, his various companies all used chartered ships for transport.

The Norwegian ice trade was an important customer for foreign carriers. We see this very clearly in the use of Danish sailing ships in the North and Baltic Sea trade in the 1870s.<sup>200</sup> T. J. Wiborg Jnr sought out Danish brokers who knew the shipping companies in the southern part of Fyn in Denmark, a sailing ship hub in much the same way as the Aust-Agder region in Norway.<sup>201</sup> In the autumn of 1871, T. J. Wiborg Jnr contacted two brokers in Fyn, Hude & Son in Svendborg and Ishøj & Grube in Marstal on the island of Ærø,<sup>202</sup> for the purpose of securing ships the following year to transport ice and timber, mainly to the UK. In 1872, T. J. Wiborg Jnr was the agent of 84 ships, 64 of which were Danish.<sup>203</sup> Of

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196 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journal (1874).

197 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Copy books (7 November 1874–7 September 1875; September 1875–August 1876). Copy books are missing for the period leading up to 1883, so it is not possible to determine the duration of the collaboration.

198 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journal (1872–1879).

199 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journal (1876).

200 Holm-Petersen & Rosendahl (1951), pp. 239–240.

201 Hermansen K. (2008), p. 88; Hanisch (1983), p. 119.

202 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Copy book (1871–1873); Letters to Hude & Son and Ishøj & Grube (autumn 1871).

203 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journal (1872).

these, 12 were chartered through Hude & Son and 27 through Ishøy & Grube.<sup>204</sup> In other words, only 20 Norwegian ships were chartered. This year was not exceptional: throughout the 1870s a large proportion of the sailing ships chartered were from foreign companies, many of which were Danish (see Table 3-2).<sup>205</sup>

**Table 3-2.** Nationality and number of ships transporting ice or timber

Chartered by T. J. Wiborg Jnr (1872-1878) and Wiborg & Somerville (1878-1879).

Year	1872	1873	1874	1875	1876	1877	1878	1879	Total
Denmark	64	35	12	13	39	17	7	5	192
Sweden		2							2
Finland							1		1
UK				1	3		1		5
Germany					2	1	1		4
The Netherlands			2						2
<b>Total foreign</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>206</b>
<b>Total Norwegian</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>150</b>
<b>Total ships</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>356</b>
<b>Foreign in %</b>	76%	88%	56%	45%	79%	29%	23%	38%	58%
<b>Norwegian in %</b>	24%	12%	44%	55%	21%	71%	77%	62%	42%

Sources: Compiled on the basis of the Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journal (1872-1891).

Table 3-2 clearly demonstrates that foreign ships dominated during the first five years of the decade. In the last three years, the share of foreign vessels was about 30%, and this level remained stable during the 1880s and 1890s. The reason for the large proportion of ships from southern Fyn in Denmark is that shipping from this area was predominantly carried out by wooden sailing ships, which were suitable for both ice and timber transport. They probably also had crews with experience handling these commodities.

Taking an international perspective gives us further insights into how the transportation of Norwegian ice was carried out. In the literature, both ice and timber shipping have been seen as typical Norwegian

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journal (1872-1879).

activities and the typical ice exporter as the owner of the ship.<sup>206</sup> In the case of Wiborg, we have a major Norwegian ice exporter who did not own his own ships for many years and who chartered largely foreign vessels for transport. What we know is that chartering ships as Wiborg did was a common way of securing shipping space.<sup>207</sup> In fact, owners of both wooden steamships and sailing ships tried to establish conferences, i.e. cartels, in order to be able to control the prices for chartering ships to transport ice. Without a market for chartered ships in the ice trade, this would not have been expedient (see also page 127).

Also the maritime author Gøthe Gøthesen confirms this when he writes, *It is important to bear in mind that a great deal of ice was transported by ships that had no fixed connection to the ice trade, ships that occasionally took a load of ice while they were otherwise engaged in other trades.*<sup>208</sup>

The approach seems to have been common, albeit with some regional differences. In the case of the town Kragerø, for example, it has been described that the ice trade was conducted by local vessels, either owned by the ice exporters or chartered from within the region, and the same applies to Brevik and Langesund.<sup>209</sup> In the case of Porsgrunn, it has been described that the ice trade was conducted by vessels from other cities and also by foreign steamships as early as the 1870s.<sup>210</sup> In the Kristiania Fjord region, few sources have addressed this issue, but in Kristiania, at least two of the larger ice exporters chartered international tonnage,<sup>211</sup> namely T. J. Wiborg and the ice export pioneer Søren Parr.<sup>212</sup> As early as 1865, it is documented that Parr chartered foreign vessels to transport ice.<sup>213</sup> The Parr family did, in fact, own a number of sailing ships from 1850 onwards,

206 Wiborg (1943), p. 1; Worm-Müller (1935), p. 693.

207 For more information, see Nygaard (2022). Two conferences in the natural ice trade. In volume 34 of the *International Journal of Maritime History*.

208 Gøthesen (1986), p. 137. (Translation by the author).

209 Pedersen (1933), pp. 40–48; Tønnesen (1957), p. 305; Norseng (2014), p. 154.

210 Tønnesen (1957), p. 305; Norseng (2014), p. 154.

211 Norwegian Maritime Museum. The Worm-Müller Collection. Brevik/Langesund. A note from Thomas Johannes Wiborg dated February 1926.

212 Worm-Müller (1935), p. 689; National Library. The Worm-Müller Collection III, transcribed interview with Kammerherrerinde Egeberg, born Parr (daughter of Søren Parr) (23 May 1935); Egeberg (1957), p. 34.

213 *Morgenbladet* (23 July 1865). Chartering of ships for ice transport.

but these were partly owned by a member of the family, Hans Henry Parr, who was not directly involved in the ice export trade. Furthermore, most of the vessels owned by Søren Parr were not of a suitable size for ice transport.<sup>214</sup> If we also take into account the amount of sailing ships from the southern part of Denmark that participated in the Norwegian ice trade,<sup>215</sup> this shows that others in addition to Wiborg chartered Danish ships, and we can conclude that carrying ice on ships was a part of the international shipping market.

### *Ice export and production*

Wiborg's business plan gradually took shape during the 1870s. The aim to fully enter the ice trade can be seen in his correspondence with shipbrokers. In the early 1870s, he contacted UK brokers with whom he wanted to do business. An example is Turnbull, Salvesen & Co. in Leith in Scotland, with whom he entered into business. As with many of the foreign players Wiborg did business with, the company had a Norwegian partner, Christian Salvesen, originally from Mandal. The following year in 1872, Salvesen withdrew from the firm and established his own company, Chr. Salvesen & Co. With this company, Wiborg continued a relationship that lasted for about 30 years.<sup>216</sup>

In April 1872, the company placed four advertisements in two Danish newspapers (*Berlingske Tidende* and *Dagbladet*), specifically aimed at Danish customers.<sup>217</sup> A draft of one of the advertisements (see Picture 3-1) reads:

Ice.

Fresh-water ice blocks from 12 inches thick and upwards, freely delivered in good Danish ports at 16/- per English ton 2000 lb. For cargoes from 30 tons and upwards, contact Wiborg Jnr Brevik Norway.

214 Ibid. Søren Parr began chartering ships for ice transport because of the decline in the shipping market in the 1870s and 1880s, after finding that its margins were higher if the tonnage was chartered, according to Worm-Müller. Worm-Müller (1935), p. 690; Egeberg (1957), p. 34.

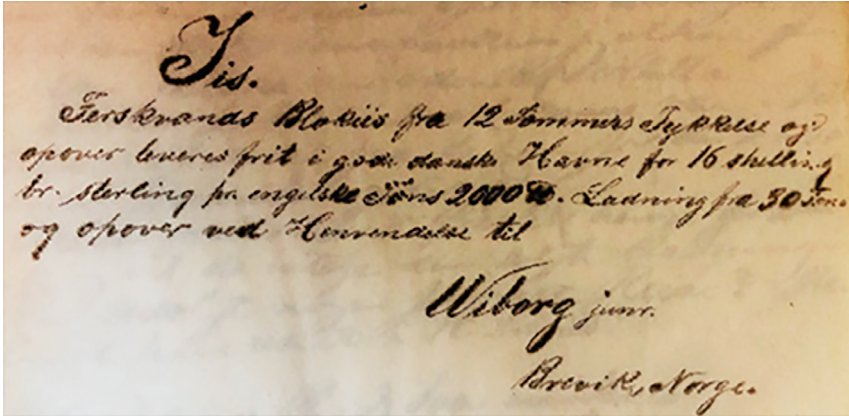
215 Hermansen (2008), p. 88; Holm-Petersen & Rosendahl (1951), pp. 239–240.

216 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Copy book (1871–1873). Letter to Turnbull, Salvesen & Co., Glasgow (24 August 1871).

217 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Copy book Wiborg Jnr (1871–1873). Letters to the Copenhagen newspapers *Berlingske Tidende* and *Dagbladet* (18 April 1872).



The advertisements certainly appear to have had the desired effect, given that the company received several orders from Danish buyers in the months that followed.<sup>218</sup>



**Picture 3-1.** Draft advertisement for the newspapers *Berlingske Tidende* and *Dagbladet*.

Source: Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Copy book (18 April 1872)

Wiborg started to offer ice broking to his broker connections in the timber trade, often in the form of identical letters sent to various brokers with an offer to mediate the sale of one or more ice shipments. For example, on 19 March 1875, offers were sent to shipbrokers in three cities, all of whom had experience in both timber and ice:<sup>219</sup> H. A. Clarkson<sup>220</sup> in London; Mullock & Sons<sup>221</sup> in Limerick, Ireland; and Brodersen, Vaughan & Co. in Liverpool. In 2019, reflecting on its history, Mullock & Sons wrote the following on its website, under the headline ‘In recent Years’ (sic.): ‘*There were good times to follow. Old trades; Grain for Milling, Corn for feed, Salt Pork & Bacon and Butter, Condensed Milk and Canned Steak, and all the downstream extras of shook’s and staves for Barrels, salt for curing*

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Copy book (1874–1875), pp. 365–367.

<sup>220</sup> Clarkson PLC. <https://www.clarksons.com/about-us/our-history/>. Clarkson, founded in 1852, is currently (2020) one of the world’s leading shipbrokers.

<sup>221</sup> Mullock & Sons Shipbrokers Ltd. <https://www.mullocks.com/about>. Mullock & Sons was founded in 1778 and is still (in 2020) one of Ireland’s leading shipbrokers.

*and Fresh Water Ice each Spring from Norway's lakes to pack the Cold Stores in warm Summer days are gone forever ...'* (my emphasis).<sup>222</sup>

H. A. Clarkson started up in 1852 and soon became one of the most frequently used London brokers by companies in the Norwegian maritime sector in the 19th century.<sup>223</sup> It was not uncommon for Norwegian ship-owners to send their sons to H. A. Clarkson for a couple of years in order to learn the business. Brodersen, Vaughan & Co. was a shipping company and broker, established in 1873 and based in Liverpool. It specialised in the needs of the Norwegian shipping sector.<sup>224</sup> As the name indicates, one of the partners, Claus Brodersen (1844–1917), was Norwegian.<sup>225</sup> Two years after its establishment, the company was the most important shipping agency for Norwegian vessels using the Port of Liverpool and handled vessels with a total net carrying capacity of 34,690 reg. tons.<sup>226</sup> It also did business with T. J. Wiborg in 1875, in connection with timber. In February that year, it was commissioned to sell timber battens, with a mandate *'to accept the highest offer above eleven pounds ten, delivered to a good harbour in Morocco.'*<sup>227</sup> The company was given authorisation to close the transaction. In March 1875, the company received a further request to mediate the sale of ice.<sup>228</sup> This was the beginning of a long-standing collaboration which we will come back to later in the book.<sup>229</sup>

What we note is that Wiborg, by being active in the market and drawing on many contacts, was in effect building up a sizeable network that was to become a cornerstone in his ice export business. In the context of the economic downturn in the second half of the 1870s, in both shipping and timber,<sup>230</sup> he first reduced his timber trade from 1876 and concentrated fully on the ice export trade from 1878. His original business plan,

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222 <https://www.mullocks.com/about>

223 Clarkson PLC. <https://www.clarksons.com/about-us/our-history/>; Ytreberg (1951), pp. 295–320.

224 *Mandalsbladet* (15 March 1904); Merok & Ekberg (2009), p. 235.

225 *Mandalsbladet* (15 March 1904). Claus Brodersen hailed from Mandal in the southernmost part of Norway. <https://www.ancestry.com.au/genealogy/records/claus-brodersen-24-b18bm6>

226 Merok & Ekberg (2009), p. 237.

227 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Copy book (1874–1875), p. 310.

228 *Ibid.* p. 365.

229 *Ibid.* p. 310. See also Chapter 5 Collaboration with Brodersen, Vaughan & Co.

230 Hodne & Grytten (2000), pp. 223–236.

to act as a broker for both ice and timber, was abandoned within 10 years of its conception. This shift to ice export is illustrated in Table 3-3 below.

**Table 3-3.** Agency and export<sup>231</sup>

T. J. Wiborg Jnr (1872–1878), Wiborg & Somerville (1878–1879)

Year	Shiploads of ice			Shiploads of timber			Ice/timber
	Own	As agent	Total	Own	As agent	Total	Total
1872	2	27	29	1	54	55	84
1873		9	9	5	28	33	42
1874		4	4		21	21	25
1875	12	5	17	1	13	14	31
1876	35	21	56				56
1877	36	26	62				62
1878	38	5	43				43
1879	13		13				13
<b>Total</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>233</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>356</b>

Source: Compiled on the basis of the Thos. J. Wiborg Archive, Chartering journal (1872–1879).

This was a fortunate decision, as the ice market was the only market that exhibited any growth in the late 1870s. If Wiborg had remained merely a broker and agent, he would have had only very limited opportunities to increase his revenues.

An ice exporter obtained ice from owned or leased production facilities, or by buying it from others. In 1872, the first production facility is mentioned in T. J. Wiborg's chartering journal, namely the Elvik ice plant located by Åby Fjord outside Brevik (see Picture 3-2).<sup>232</sup> In the same year, his brother Ludvig was listed as the exporter of a total of four shiploads of ice and the firm of T. J. Wiborg Jnr was also listed as an exporter. From 1878 until the mid-1920s, the firm of T. J. Wiborg leased land for an ice house connected to the ice plant at Elvik.<sup>233</sup>

<sup>231</sup> T. J. Wiborg Jnr (1872–1876), T. J. Wiborg (1876–1878) and Wiborg & Somerville (1878–1879).

<sup>232</sup> Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering Journal (1872).

<sup>233</sup> The Telemark Museum Archive. TMUA BH-A-1051, *Isforretninger: Elvik Isforretning Åbyfjorden*. Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journals (1872 – 1920). Copy books (1871–1920). Diary for ice (1925); Fleischer (1925), p. 50; Poppe (1997), p. 33. In the available archive material, it has not been possible to find documentation for when Thomas Johannes Wiborg took over Elvik. The plant was on the balance sheet for 1892, with an ownership share of 50%. During 1894, a



**Picture 3-2.** Elvik ice house in 1923; the schooner 'Pampa' is loading.

Source: Courtesy of John Tore Norenberg.

In 1873, T. J. Wiborg took another step towards becoming a producer of ice, when he and his brother Ludvig bought three tracts of marshland at Høvikheia by Åby Fjord, which was to be dammed to create ice ponds.<sup>234</sup> However, this venture did not flourish and Thomas Johannes later sold his share to Ludvig.<sup>235</sup>

In 1877, Wiborg cast his eyes further, to the Kristiania Fjord area, and his company exported its first cargoes of ice from this fjord on 1 June 1877, with T. J. Wiborg as exporter (owner of the cargo).<sup>236</sup> The ice was bought from his cousin, Fritz Sophus Frølich, who had built an ice plant in Haslum in Frogn in the vicinity of Kristiania, with two ponds, ice chutes and a warehouse.<sup>237</sup> The firm T. J. Wiborg exported 13 shiploads of

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change took place and on the balance sheet for 1894, the ownership share was increased to 100%. There is no reference in the copybook for this year as to why. The last time Elvik was mentioned, was in the diary for ice in 1925.

<sup>234</sup> Zakariassen (1975), p. 681.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journal (1872–1891).

<sup>237</sup> The facility was subsequently separated out and sold to F. H. Frølich & Son, a company in which Frølich, his father and his brother had interests. Information obtained from Lill Elisabeth Sinding Havstad, the current owner of Haslum ice ponds (26 March 2020). Lokalhistoriewiki.no

ice from Haslum in 1877 and 14 in 1880.<sup>238</sup> In the same year, F. H. Frølich & Son went bankrupt, and the plant was bought by the ice exporter Søren Parr. The Haslum plant is not further mentioned in the Wiborg archives.<sup>239</sup>

## Wiborg & Somerville

For Wiborg, exporting ice that he owned – whether produced or bought – had proved possible but difficult. Buying ice was sometimes problematic in a volatile market where firms failed as well as succeeded. In 1878, Wiborg entered into a partnership with his brother-in-law Thomas Townsend Somerville and established the company Wiborg & Somerville.<sup>240</sup> The aim was to produce and sell ice. The company became insolvent during the year,<sup>241</sup> and this bankruptcy may help to explain why Wiborg & Somerville moved to Kristiania in 1879. Only 13 shiploads of ice were listed in the company’s chartering journal that year.<sup>242</sup> These ice consignments were not labelled as ‘closed’ transactions, which means that they were probably never shipped. This is supported by the company’s invoice book, in which no transactions are listed that year.<sup>243</sup>

Throughout the invoice book, all of Wiborg’s different companies’ business activities were characterised by long-term connections and customer relationships, where the same brokers and ice importers recurred year after year.<sup>244</sup> Below is the story of two companies that imported ice from Wiborg, which illustrates the long-term relationships between Thomas Johannes Wiborg and his customers abroad that started in the 1870s.

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Haslum (Frogn) [https://lokalhistoriewiki.no/wiki/Haslum\\_\(Frogn\)](https://lokalhistoriewiki.no/wiki/Haslum_(Frogn)); Fleischer (1925), pp. 160–168, 171–172.

238 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journal (1872–1891).

239 Information from Lill Elisabeth Sinding Havstad, current owner of Haslum ponds (26 March 2020). Lokalhistoriewiki.no Haslum (Frogn); Fleischer (1925), pp. 160–168, 171–172.

240 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journal (1872–1879).

241 Hambro (1901), p. 40, case 691.

242 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journal (1872–1891).

243 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Invoice book (1876–1890).

244 Ibid., Protocol with ice contracts (1896–1915).

### *Collaboration with Prytz & Co. in Bordeaux*

The Scandinavian firm Prytz & Co., based in Bordeaux, was one of the first companies with which T. J. Wiborg established a relationship.<sup>245</sup> The initial inquiry to sell ice to Bordeaux was made in January 1872, when Wiborg Jnr sent a request to the company Paul Benan to find out if it could sell ice for T. J. Wiborg in the Bordeaux/La Rochelle area.<sup>246</sup> Nothing came of this first contact, but in January the following year, Wiborg Jnr wrote to Messrs Prytz & Co., confirming a shipload of 400–500 or 700 tons of ice, depending on how much was sold.<sup>247</sup> In so doing, Wiborg had found a company that could sell his ice in the area, thus ushering in a customer-agent relationship that continued until 1890



**Picture 3-3.** Prytz & Co.  
Source: © Musées de Cognac

when ice exports ceased, although the friendship continued to flourish.

Demand was so great during 1873 that Wiborg Jnr had to send four shiploads of ice,<sup>248</sup> followed by three in the following year and a total of 18 in the period from 1873 to 1889.<sup>249</sup> Prytz & Co. received a commission of 5% of the gross income as payment.<sup>250</sup> The company also traded in wine and cognac, and exported to Scandinavia and as far away as the East Indies.<sup>251</sup> (See Picture 3-3). In the 1870s and 1880s, Prytz & Co. acted as forwarding agents for several Scandinavian steamship lines between Bordeaux and cities in Scandinavia, in addition to being agents for

245 The proprietor of Prytz & Co. in Bordeaux, A. M. Prytz, was from Scandinavia. But since Prytz is a common name in Scandinavia, the author has not found out whether he was from Sweden, Norway or Denmark.

246 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Copy book (1871–1873), Letter to Paul Benan (22 January 1872).

247 Ibid., Letter to Prytz & Co. (15 January 1873).

248 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Copy book (1873–1874). Telegram and letter to Prytz & Co. (spring 1873).

249 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journal (1872–1891), Copy book (1874–1875), Invoice book (1876–1890).

250 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Invoice book (1876–1890).

251 Musées de Cognac. Billboard Prytz & Co. *Stockholms Dagblad* (15 December 1886). Wine from Prytz & Co. for sale.

importing ice to the city.<sup>252</sup> The depth of the friendship between T. J. Wiborg and A. M. Prytz is evident when in 1891, Wiborg wanted to send his 16-year-old daughter Justine to Bordeaux to learn French.<sup>253</sup> He then contacted A. M. Prytz to find a suitable place for her to live and a suitable school for her to attend. Justine lived with the Prytz family, who looked after her after she arrived in the city in January 1892,<sup>254</sup> and the friends maintained a close correspondence on Justine's stay in the winter and spring of the year. This correspondence is also interesting in the context of the ice trade. In one letter to A. M. Prytz, T. J. Wiborg writes about why the sale of ice to Bordeaux had stopped, saying, '*It is unfortunate that the ice factory can thus undersell us.*'<sup>255</sup> In other words, he was complaining that the production of local factory-made ice was outcompeting him. Wiborg wondered whether they could find a 'speculator' who might try to sell Norwegian natural ice on the local market and wrote that if this was the case, he would be able to sell the ice very cheaply. However, at the end of the letter he concluded that he understood that it was the large loss of ice through melting and the high labour costs in Bordeaux that made it difficult for Norwegian ice to compete with factory-made ice in the city.<sup>256</sup> However, T. J. Wiborg maintained contact with A. M. Prytz right up to the 1920s and imported wine from Prytz throughout the period.<sup>257</sup>

### *Collaboration with Josias Pernis in Cagliari, Sardinia*

The Wiborg companies also enjoyed a long-term relationship with the company Josias Pernis in Cagliari, Sardinia, where ice exports continued for a period of 30 years.<sup>258</sup> Josias Pernis was a Swiss national who had fled

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252 *Morgenbladet* (7 December 1873). Start-up of regular steamship line in March 1874 (Swedish Lloyds) Bordeaux, Gothenburg, Kristiania. *Romsdals Amtstidende* (4 April 1878). Sailings Chr.sund-Bergen-Havre-Bordeaux.

253 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Copy book (1888–1892). Letters (27 October 1891–27 May 1892), pp. 451–500.

254 *Ibid.*

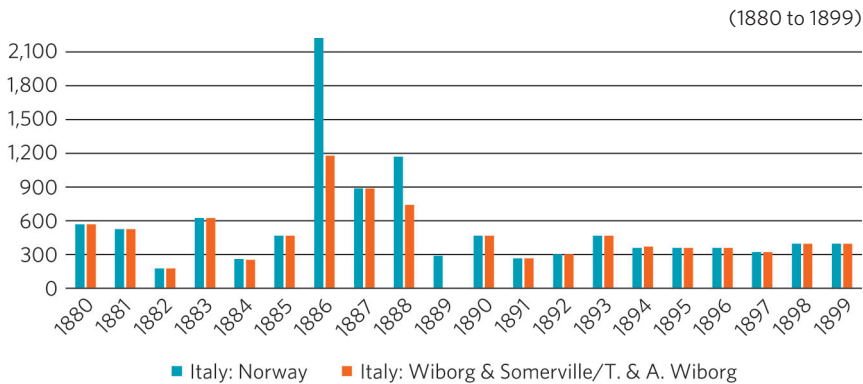
255 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Copy book (1888–1892), p. 500. Letter of 27 May 1892.

256 *Ibid.*

257 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Copy book (1917–27 December 1920), p. 443. Letter of 24 April 1920. Request regarding wine sent by steamship.

258 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Invoice book (1876–1890), Chartering journals (1872–1891; 1892–1905; 1906–1920), Protocol with ice contracts (1904–1909).

from Napoleon and, by chance, ended up in Cagliari, where he settled and founded a large trading house, exporting wine and salt and importing Scandinavian timber and Norwegian ice.<sup>259</sup> The company was one of the largest in Cagliari and received the Italian Ministry of Agriculture's gold medal for the best vineyard in Italy in 1898.<sup>260</sup> Between 1878 and 1908, the company purchased a shipload of ice annually from Wiborg's various companies.<sup>261</sup> The ice was stored in natural limestone caves on Pernis' property.<sup>262</sup> During much of this period, this ice cargo represented the only direct shipping connection between Norway and Italy. A consulate report for Cagliari from 1893 described how the company's supply of ice had become integral to annual shipping activities linked to the city: *'As usual, a cargo of about 450 tons of ice was imported directly from Norway.'*<sup>263</sup> Figure 3-2 shows a comparison of total Norwegian exports to Italy in the 1880s and 1890s with the Wiborg companies' exports of ice to Josias Pernis, and displays the unique situation by which a single company accounted for most of the Norwegian ice export over an extended period.



**Figure 3-2.** Ice export to Italy, Wiborg companies and total Norwegian exports.<sup>264</sup>

Sources: Compiled on the basis of the Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Invoice book (1880-1889), Chartering journal (1890-1899); Statistics Norway. Historical statistics of external trade (1880-1899).

259 Zanda (2013), p. 195. More information about Josias Pernis can be found in English at: Pernis Josias – Cimitero Monumentale di Bonaria Comune – Cagliari: <https://www.cimiterobonaria.it/scheda/booo34/>

260 *Bingia Pernis: la storia*: [http://web.tiscali.it/bellezza\\_service/index.html](http://web.tiscali.it/bellezza_service/index.html)

261 Between 300 and 500 tons of ice.

262 Zanda (2013), p. 196.

263 Statistics Norway. Consulate reports from the consuls of Sweden/Norway (1893), p. 569.

264 Ibid.



For example, the consulate report for Cagliari in 1898 records that a single 393-ton ship arrived from Norway, containing about 500 tons of ice.<sup>265</sup> In T. & A. Wiborg's charter journal for 1898 we find that in February 1898, the 393-ton barque *Fanny* shipped about 500 tons of ice from the lake Bondivannet outside Kristiania to Cagliari.<sup>266</sup> In other words, we have independent records of the same ship carrying the same cargo. The Consul at this time was Pietro Pernis, Josias Pernis' eldest son.<sup>267</sup> In 1904, we begin to see signs that the business was coming to an end when Pernis asked Wiborg to try to arrange the cheapest shipping terms possible and also to reduce the price. The reason for this was that the competition with artificial factory made ice was '*becoming almost unbearable*'.<sup>268</sup> Four years later, in 1908, we see the last ice shipment bound for Cagliari.<sup>269</sup> After 30 years, Wiborg's ice export activities to Cagliari in Sardinia were over, outcompeted by factory-made ice.

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Ice was Norway's fastest-growing export industry measured in tons in the 1870s. The most important importing country was the UK, where over 85% of Norwegian ice was exported. T. J. Wiborg established his own business under the name Thos. J. Wiborg Jnr in 1870. During the 1870s, the business developed from being an agent for timber and ice to being an ice exporter. Wiborg experienced problems in the start-up phase and, after going bankrupt in 1878, he established the company of Wiborg & Somerville with his brother-in-law Thomas Townsend Somerville and moved the business to Kristiania. The company did not own any ships and chartered ships for transporting the ice. As charterer, the Wiborg firms were closely linked to the international shipping market.

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265 Statistics Norway. Reports on trade and shipping (1898), pp. 566–568.

266 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journal (1892–1905), p. 55.

267 Statistics Norway. Reports on trade and shipping (1898).

268 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Protocol with ice contracts (1904–1909); Letter from Josias Pernis (4 October 1904).

269 Thos. J. Wiborg Archive. Chartering journal (1906–1920).

