

JAMES ALEXANDER BURNS, BORN 1887

Jim Burns was born in the Argentine of a Scots father and a Scots-Uruguayan mother. At 17, after schooling in Rosario, Edinburgh and London, he joined a British coal and shipping agency. His first job was as a coaling clerk in the Cape Verde Islands, his last as general manager in Brazil. Following retirement he worked in the British Embassy in Rio de Janeiro before returning to Britain in 1949.

This life story is by a grandson, Peter Carolin, with family photographs from another grandson, Richard Cooper.

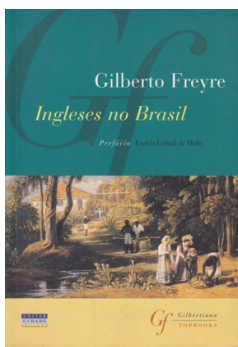
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1. Introduction

James Alexander Burns – known as Jim to his family and Burns to his colleagues – was my maternal grandfather. Quiet and modest, he wrote far, far more about others in the family than he did of himself. But he was a not uninteresting man. Son of a lowland Scots father and a Scots-Uruguayan mother, he was a representative of what the historian Niall Ferguson referred to in *Empire* as ‘the informal British Empire’ that played such a large part in South America between 1808 and 1914. Born in the Argentine and educated in Britain, he started his first job in the Cape Verde Islands at the age of 18, worked most of his life in Brazil, returned ‘home’ to join the Home Guard in 1940 and, after a final period working in Brazil as a diplomat, retired to the heatherlands of south Surrey.



Freyre's book

Jim's picture of Coimbra

His finest painting, the 'Monarch'

He may have been a Scot but the British in Brazil have always been called Ingles – and he was the epitome of the archetypical Ingles, so wonderfully described in Gilberto Freyre's so-far untranslated book, *Ingleses no Brasil* (The English in Brazil), above. He didn't just wear a black jacket or suit on Sundays, he wore it on weekdays as well – with a black tie, black shoes, black hat and, when appropriate, a black umbrella. Solicitous Brazilians used to ask my grandmother who he was mourning.

He stood to attention when ‘God Save the King’ was played and he had an almost inordinate respect for authority – and, in particular, senior officers in the Royal and Brazilian Navies and the captains of the passenger and cargo liners for whom he acted as agent.

But there was another side to him – far from his working life as a coaling clerk, shipping agent or diplomat. He loved beautiful places – whether the colonial town of Ouro Preto in Brazil or, his favourite city, Coimbra. And he collected beautiful things – paintings and prints, antique furniture and Portuguese colonial and late Arts and Crafts silver. Towards the end of his life, these objects were his escape from a world he felt out of touch with and he sat alone for hours, gently drawing on his cigar, enjoying the beauty of his collection. Encouraged by his two daughters, he also took the trouble to type out ‘Notes on the Family’, ‘Supplement to Notes on the Family’, ‘Pernambuco Notes (Warships)’, ‘Random Memories of the Argentine Some Sixty or

Seventy Years ago' and other memoirs. It is largely upon these that this account has been based.

2. Parentage

Jim's father's family came from Ayrshire and Galloway. His paternal grandfather, lived at the Stroan – a stone house which still stands in Glen Trool – and described himself as a 'herd' (or shepherd). His grandmother, Janet Wilson, came from another family of herds who lived in Culsharg, a lonely cottage in a beautiful little valley on the slopes of the Merrick above Glen Trool. Jim's father, Alexander Burns, was born at the Stroan in 1855 and attended the local school at Bargrennan, to which he would walk three miles each way. After more advanced schooling at Moniave, he entered the local branch of the Union Bank of Scotland in 1872, aged 17. Following periods in various country branches, he was moved to head office in Glasgow. In 1881, aged 26, he left the Union Bank to join the London & River Plate Bank in Buenos Aires.



Culsharg in its fold on the slopes of The Merrick *Alexander Burns*

Eighty years later, in 1961, Jim wrote of his father, 'I wish I had asked him about his life. For he was not a man to talk about it himself.' However, Jim knew that he had risen quickly in the Bank, becoming accountant in, successively, Rosario in 1886, Montevideo in 1888 and Buenos Aires in 1890. He was appointed manager (and 'Townhead' – head of the British community?) in Rosario in 1892. Five years later, in 1897, a Scottish-Argentine cashier by the name of Shaw went off with some money and, as manager, Alexander was held responsible. He was recalled to London. He had been well liked in Rosario – the El Comercio del Rosario made him handsome presentations and the staff of the Bank gave him a fine gold watch with a pleasant inscription and a document of appreciation. Latterly, he had had a difficult time in the Argentine, owing to the poor local economic climate and, in the middle 1890s, the Baring Crisis. Back in London, he was offered the sub-managership of the London Bank of Mexico. He had a difficult time there too, and, around 1908, was offered the managership of the Banco Espanol de La Plata in London, working there until he retired, aged 68, in 1923. He died in 1928. Jim summed him up as 'a very silent man, chary of giving advice but what he said was always worth listening to.'

Jim's parents had married in Rosario in 1886. His mother, Herminia, was the daughter of a Scots engineer, James Bell, and his wife, Clarita Pinto, the daughter of

Portuguese immigrants to the Banda Oriental – now Uruguay but, in those days, a disputed territory between the Argentine and Brazil. At the time of their marriage, James Bell must have been about 40 and Clarita no more than 16. The Bells were a large Lanarkshire family and there is mention of an estate at Wheatpark while family lore has it that the Pintos were sephardic jews. James Bell was in Rio de Janeiro around 1850 before going to Monte Video where, as an engineer, he undertook contracting work and is said to have laid out the old park, the Prado. A wealthy man, he owned a yacht, the ‘Nancy Bell’ in which he sailed on the River Plate. At the time of the terrible Paraguayan War he was working for the crazy dictator Francisco Solana Lopes, making torpedoes. He died of either yellow fever or cholera at Humaita, having been prevented by Lopes from leaving the country.



James Bell



Clarita Bell (née Pinto)



Daughter, Herminia Bell

At the time of James Bell’s death, Jim’s mother, Herminia, was aged 10 and, together with her younger sister, Clarita, living in Hamburg with her uncle, the Revd. James Bell. In later life she recalled the soldiers returning from the Franco-Prussian war. There is no record of when or how the two young girls returned to Montevideo but it appears that they did so not long after their father’s death. When they returned, they had forgotten all their Spanish and could not at first communicate with their mother who, shortly after, moved with them to Buenos Aires. James Bell has left them very badly off but things must have become a bit easier when Herminia was able to start teaching in Mendoza, in one of the ‘normal schools’ set up by President Sarmiento. There, she met some of the American teachers brought in by the President and, as a result of this and other friendships, visited Boston in 1883 or 5, shortly before her marriage.

3. Early years

Jim's parents, Alexander and Herminia, married in Mendoza in 1886. Born in 1887, the first of five children – the fourth of whom died when 13 days old – he would have moved with his parents to Montevideo and Buenos Aires before returning to Rosario in 1892, aged 5. He never wrote about those early years in Rosario and I never heard him speak or claim to speak any Spanish. All we know about that period is that the family lived on two floors, behind the Bank, 'in fine quarters', and made two visits to Britain. The first, in 1890, was when they returned to Britain on leave on the Lamport and Holt liner *Coleridge*, Captain Brown. [Jim had this habit of always identifying a ship's captain. How on earth, aged 3, did he know Brown's name, you may well ask. The answer is that his mother, Herminia, was a friend of the Captain and his wife and must have spoken about them when he was older.] Arriving in Britain, the family went to stay in a boarding house at 15 St Helen's Crescent, Southsea, kept by a retired NCO in the Royal Marines, Mr Derbyshire, and his wife. There, in October 1890, Jim's sister, Herminia Clarita (always known as Lita) was born. The next visit to Britain was in late 1894 when:

'... my mother and her four children (Jim, Jack, Lita and Walter, born in Rosario in 1893) ... landed from the Danube with measles. The health doctor spoke of an isolation hospital but my mother could be formidable and she got us into rooms in a house occupied by an old lady and her middle aged son who did the cooking and other work and was kind to the children.' Herminia and the children then went up to Edinburgh to stay (in the Grecian Villa – later demoted to Cottage – in Lennox Row, in the Trinity district) near their Bell relations. It was during this stay, during which he attained the age of 8, that Jim attended the Edinburgh Academy for the Lent and Summer Terms in class P.1.



The Rosario bank



RMS Magdalena



Grecian Villa, Leith

In 1897, when Jim was 15, the cashier went off with the money and Alexander Burns was recalled from Rosario to London. It must have been a difficult and sad departure. After 16 successful years, his father's South American career was over. Apart from the odd visit, his mother had never lived in Britain and was leaving her behind her own mother, sister and many friends – almost certainly never to see them again. Years later, Jim wrote:

'The last time I saw my grandmother (Clarita Bell) was when we sailed from La Plata ... in the Magdalena, Captain Pope ... in December 1897. I can see her still, a

lonely, sad figure on the quayside watch the ship sail, and I am sorry to say that I never wrote to her. She had a sad life on little or no means – I believe that my father maintained her – and was practically blind. She was a widow for 58 years and died at nearly 83, in 1925. There is an early photograph of her ... She looks very Portuguese ... She spoke little or no English...'

Arriving in England, the family settled somewhere in South London before moving, in 1904, to a house (destroyed in WW 2) in Coleraine Road, Blackheath. Jim and Jack went to a private school, the Central Hill College for the Sons of Gentlemen in Gypsy Hill. *'It was no good',* wrote Jim, *'In fact I never caught up, either at Colet Court or at St Paul's because of my earlier education. Despite the fact that I worked (hard) at both these places, I was with boys eighteen months younger than I was. I attained the Upper Sixth after being a whole year in Hall doing nothing but Latin and Greek, not exactly useful for a commercial life since my mathematics were and are still below average.'* Leaving St Paul's in December 1903, he went to Pitman's College in Southampton Row for a term. It was the end of his schooling. He was just under 17.

4. St Vincent

In April 1903, Jim was engaged by Wilson, Sons and Co. Ltd, Salisbury House, London Wall at a salary of £30 a year. Wilson's (later known as Ocean Coal and Wilsons) had been founded in Brazil in 1837 and were coal and shipping agents – providing, through a world-wide network of coaling stations, the fuel for the coal-burning ships that carried the trade of the world and, in the case of warships, 'protected all those who pass upon the seas upon their lawful occasions'.

Jim was interviewed by the fearsome manager, Mr Thornley – 'a duodenal case' – who asked Jim what form he had been in when he left school. *'To the reply "Upper Sixth, Sir" he said "That's good", to which I had to say "The Upper Eighth is the highest, Sir"'* – A response which just about sums up my grandfather.

He later claimed that he was taken on by Wilsons because his father was known and appreciated by the Chairman, Mr Bowen (later Sir Albert Bowen). Jim worked in the London head office and, 45 years later, wrote a long and detailed account of its personalities and organisation. Full of amusing anecdote it ends with the following paragraph:

'I find that I have referred often to moustaches. The bearded period was drawing to an end and that of walrus moustaches had arrived; so much so, that I recall a man in Sao Paulo saying to me, "It is not Wilson, Sons and Co. It's Walrus, Sons and Co." But I think he was in his cups.' Jim hardly drank and was always clean shaven.



Jim, centre, parents and siblings 1904 St Vincent, Mindelo coaling station 1904

In April 1904, Jim asked to go to Wilson's coaling station at St Vincent in the Cape Verde Islands at an annual salary of £150. He went much against his mother's wishes. Looking back, he wrote:

'I feel sorry for her now. Eventually she agreed because I pointed out that otherwise I should lose seniority and I did not imagine for a moment that the Company would have permitted a prolonged stay in Head Office – in those days reserved to a great extent for the relations of Directors and the like. My mother said that she would never agree to my going to Dakar or Santos, presumably because of their somewhat earlier reputation for yellow fever, which I caught in Pernambuco (Recife) in 1918!'

That Jim and his mother were close is clear from the photographs – family portraits, really – which must have been taken in Blackheath shortly before his departure for St Vincent. They all knew that a long separation lay ahead.

Jim’s diary of the ‘voyage to St Vincent, Cape Verde Islands in 1905 to join Wilson Sons & Co Ltd, Coal Merchants, as Coaling Clerk’ survives. It starts at Liverpool on May 11 1905 and, like so many diaries of this kind, peters out – at Lisbon, on 17 May – before the journey is concluded. It is the earliest example of his mature handwriting that exists and is instantly recognisable as the basis for the signature which tailed his always typewritten letters and memoranda in later life. After taking a cab from the Lime Street Station Hotel to the Prince’s Landing Stage, Jim and his father boarded the *Panama* – a small but ‘very comfortable ship’ – before they parted:

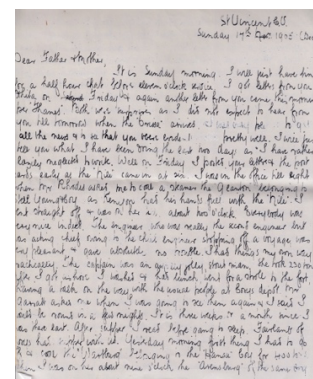
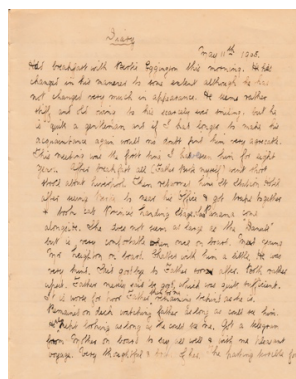
‘Said goodbye to Father ... Both rather upset. Father merely said “Be good”, which was quite sufficient. It is worse for poor Father than for me, remaining behind as he is. Remained on deck watching father as long as (I) could see him. He kept looking as long as he could see me. Got a telegram from Mother on board to say all well and wish me pleasant voyage. Very thoughtful and brave of her. The parting terrible for her. I of course felt upset at leaving home and saying goodbye to Father but God grant that we will all meet again in a few years in good health. I am not at all so upset as I might have been. I suppose it is the novelty. It is ever so much sadder for those remaining at home. It makes you feel selfish. Pushing along Welsh coast (Anglesey), very rocky but beautiful. Something like Scotland. Sharing a cabin with a Mr Mason from Manchester. He is going out to work at Concepcion. Seems very nice. Chatted a good bit.’

The next day:

‘Felt rather ill all day, Slept before lunch and after. Boat rocked a great deal. Passed Land’s End about 10 in the morning. Spoke to a Mr Rose going out to Tarapaca bank away past Valparaiso. He was educated at Sherborne. Seems a smart fellow and has plenty to say for himself.’



SS Panama leaving La Pallice with the first diary and the start of a lifetime of letters



The following day, the ship called in at La Pallice, the seaport for La Rochelle, where he went ashore and clearly enjoyed seeing the place. There is a long description of the place and the people – whom, he noted, ‘seem intelligent’. On the other hand,

French uniforms were ‘not what one would call elegant’. After loading cargo for Valparaiso, the *Panama* sailed the following morning. It had been his first visit to France. As they crossed the Bay of Biscay, Jim ‘felt rotten and therefore lazy’. There were very short calls at Corunna, Carril (today Vilagarcia, Spain) and Lexioes. The latter gave him his first glimpse of Oporto, a city which, like Coimbra, he was to love. The diary ends with a short two-line entry on their arrival in Lisbon.

The appointment to the remote island of St Vincent placed Jim fairly and squarely on the main shipping route from Southampton to the River Plate. Indeed, it was the principal mid-Atlantic coaling port on that route (just as Las Palmas became for oil later). The likelihood of him being moved on from there to a more congenial posting in a more populous South American port must have been very strong. So, in making this first move abroad, he was following the pattern established by both his maternal grandfather and his father – of emigrating, not to part of the Empire but to the East coast of South America. Just what James Bell’s and Alexander Burns’ long-term plans had been, we do not know. It is probably likely that the former never had any plans to return to Scotland – the fact that he married a much younger Uruguayan would seem to confirm this. And, in the case of the latter (whose wife was a fluent English speaker), his career was cut short by the recall to London – so we shall never know what his intentions might have been.

Throughout the period of the British commercial hegemony in the Argentine, in particular, and, to a lesser extent in Brazil, British families tended to divide into those who settled for good in these countries and whose descendants today are fully Argentinian or Brazilian and those for whom Britain was always seen as ‘home’. ‘Home’ was where the next generation was sent to be educated before returning to South America – from whence their parents then went ‘Home’ to settle in Surrey, South Kensington or Stirlingshire. That was to be the pattern followed by Jim Burns.



Coaling – a terrible job from lighters, often done by women Jim in tropical whites

He spent two and a half years in St Vincent – first as a coaling clerk and then as a visiting or water clerk. I wish that I had asked him about this. Coaling ships was a terrible job. There is no quay at St Vincent so ships anchor in the bay and everything

to and from them has to be transported by lighter – an unpleasant and sometimes dangerous task in bad weather. The coal was delivered in sacks – all of which had to be carried up ladders or ‘brows’, and then along the decks to the point where they could then be emptied over the bunkers. In some ports, much of the lagging was done by women and I have a vague recollection that this was the case at St Vincent. Dust penetrated everywhere – covering clothes, faces, hair and hands and carrying with it that strange musty smell of unburnt coal. As a clerk, Jim would must been recording quantities, ensuring a steady flow of both sacks and lighters, recording any damage and generally working for long stretches of time in order that the ships were delayed as little as possible in port. Competition between the many British shipping lines – Royal Mail, Blue Star, Lamport and Holt, Houlder, Pacific Steam and so on – and the equally numerous foreign lines was intense: liner time-tables were as important as flight times today.



Coaling jetties at Mindelo View over the anchorage Wilson's warehouse today

St Vincent was a pretty desolate place for an 18 year old. The capital of the island of Mindelo, its deep water harbour is set in a bay surrounded by barren, rocky mountains. The British community consisted almost entirely of men working for the shipping lines and telegraph companies or Wilson's coaling rivals, Cory Brothers. They played golf and cricket on bare earth courses and pitches and there appears to have been little else to distract the young men in this small town whose grid-iron streets were lined by one, two and three-storey buildings whose once-whitewashed walls were capped by shallow-pitched pantiled roofs.

Jim used to recall that he got his higher education from the Scots ships engineers. He would have lived in a chacara, or boarding house, with other single British men and, at work and on 'formal' occasions would have worn a white suit with a single row of buttons rising at the neck to a closed high collar – the standard colonial outfit of the time which formed the basis for the tropical dress uniform by the Royal Naval officers throughout the twentieth century.

5. Santos, São Paulo and marriage

In 1907, after two and a half years in St Vincent (where his salary had risen to £200), Jim was sent to Santos, which had not known yellow fever for some years. Santos was the port for São Paulo and the coffee trade. After two months he was transferred to São Paulo, an inland town of some 800,000 inhabitants (and today the largest and fastest-growing city in South America). His salary now rose to £400 but, as he pointed out, his expenses were far higher than in desolate, fun-free St Vincent. Wilson's principal business in São Paulo must have been on the agency side – lining up cargoes and passengers both to and from Britain and the other countries (mainly Scandinavian and Baltic) for whose shipping lines the company acted as agents. In 1909 he had his first home leave.

Once again, Jim would have been living in a chacra and taking part in the activities of the large British community. He became a member of the São Paulo Athletic Club – the club which, under William Miller, was responsible for bringing football to Brazil. There is a 1911 team photograph (sadly mislaid) of him with 14 other young men – and no ball, so we are unsure whether this is a rugger team with one missing or a football team with a referee/coach and two linesmen or reserves. In 1912 he acted as Wilson's manager while the manager was away for six months on home leave.



Jeannie Maclean



James Maclean, miller, farmer and hotel owner

Jim's second home leave came in 1913. And, on 6 September 1913, in Aberdeen, this rather shy man was married to Miss Jane (Jeannie) Ann Maclean. Apart from knowing that they met in São Paulo, we know nothing of the details, nor how long they were engaged. Jeannie was the daughter of James Maclean, a farmer's son who, in 1868, at the age of 23, married Margaret Goodbrand (aged 21) at Cullen. Margaret's father was the head gardener at Cullen House. At the time of his marriage, James was a meal miller journeyman at Towie. By the time of Jeannie's birth in 1881, they were living in Tarves, where he was the miller. Margaret Goodbrand had 12 children, three of whom died shortly after birth, including the last child, Mary.

Margaret herself died seven days later of Puerperal Septicaemia. Sometime after her death in 1885, when Jeannie was 4, James married Williamina Bain. She had run an orphanage and was known in the family as The Mater. James became the owner of The Aberdeen Arms Hotel in Tarves. The Mill (now derelict), the school where Jeannie was taught (now a museum) and the Hotel (now a rather down-at-heel pub) still exist – together with the family graves (also at Cullen).

If Jim was a quiet lowlander, Jeannie was a feisty, often rather combative, highlander. She didn't get on with The Mater and, unmarried and approaching her 30s, must have grabbed at the opportunity to stay with her older sister, Bella, in São Paulo. Bella was married to a Wilson (no connection to Wilson's) in that city. By the time of her marriage, Jeannie was 31 and Jim 29 – both quite old for the time. The marriage took place at the Palace Hotel, Union Street, Aberdeen 'according to the forms of the United Free Church of Scotland'. Jim was described as a Coal and Shipping Merchants' Clerk. Jeannie was described as living at West Gibseat, Savocho – where her father was now farming. The witnesses included Jim's mother, Herminia Clariter (sic) Bell Burns and his brother Jack.

6. Pernambuco and World War I

The newly-weds returned to São Paulo in late 1913 and, in March 1914, moved to Pernambuco (today known as Recife) where Jim took over as Manager.



Recife Inner Harbour 1910 with coal lighters in foreground

War was declared on 28 July and, on 20 August, the old cruiser *Monmouth* arrived in the Outer Roads and ordered coal from Wilson's (bunker contractors to the Admiralty). Years later, Jim wrote:

'... after Captain Brandt had come ashore and called on the Captain of the Port, at that time a poor type, he signalled to his ship not to receive it and to put back in the lighters any coal which might already have been delivered to the ship. This was because the Captain of the Port had informed him that if he bunkered he would not be able to take coal again in any Brazilian port for a period of three months. In consequence, Captain Brandt, who remains in my memory as a fine type of naval officer, said that he would wait in case he had greater need of coal later. I noticed on the Monmouth some naval cadets of fourteen or fifteen, obviously proud to be on active service, also ratings with 'Coastguard' on their cap ribbons. Captain Brandt told me that this ship was in dry dock when the war started We were busy owing to the ship being in port and I had thoughts of remaining in town for the night but decided that as our first child was due that I could not do this. It was as well for, during the night, I had to go for Dr Silva Ferreira, a fine old man, and as the old British nurse was incompetent, he called me in to hand to him what was required. Jean was born in the early hours of 21 August, 1914. The Monmouth was lost with all hands at the battle of Coronel.

'The next British warship to arrive in the Outer Roads ... was the cruiser Good Hope, Rear-Admiral Christopher Craddock, Captain Franklin. I went off to her with others and boarded her on the port side by a Jacob's ladder in a heavy swell, usual in the Outer Roads. Passenger steamers made use of a wicker cage, known as a basket, and our [Wilson's] passenger lighter for handling people. Soon after I got on board, the ship fired a salute, regulated by the Captain of Marines going from side to side of the ship with a stopwatch. Captain Franklin was an exceptionally tall, fine looking man, the Admiral short with a beard. I noticed a mate superintending the lowering of a gangway on the starboard side, so I remarked to him "Surely, you are not going to use a gangway in this sea." His reply was "You do not know our Admiral!" I went

ashore in a launch with the Admiral and his Flag Lieutenant. I sat near him and he asked questions.

'There may have been twelve German steamers inside the reef and one Austrian. The Flag Lieutenant took a note of the names of the vessels we passed. They had started arriving from all parts of the horizon even before war started. Some had remained in the Outer Roads and then ... disappeared usually after nightfall. The German cruiser Karlsruhe was operating off the North-East coast of Brazil and sank many vessels. She was said afterwards to have blown up.'

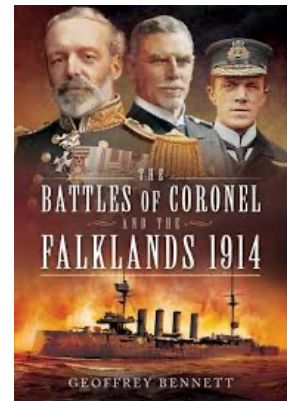
'The Good Hope did not order coal at Pernambuco but I have a letter from Admiral Craddock's secretary, of the name of Owens, giving the Admiral's instructions that 1,800 tons of coal were to be reserved for him at Bahia [Salvador] ... The Good Hope and her ship's complement were lost in the Battle of Coronel.' Some time after the Good Hope sailed from Pernambuco, the old battleship *Canopus* arrived. She was commanded by Captain Heathcote Grant, 'an elderly thick-set man in a white sun helmet' who later became an Admiral. His ship was meant to join Craddock's squadron but, such was her condition that she never caught up with it. That was indeed fortunate because like *Monmouth* and *Good Hope* she was no match for Admiral Graf von Spee's squadron.



Admiral Craddock



HMS Good Hope



Dreadful encounters

The only two ships that escaped the action off Coronel were the modern light cruiser *Glasgow* and the armed merchant cruiser *Otranto* – both of which were ordered by Craddock to disperse. The defeat at Coronel – the Royal Navy's first since before Trafalgar – galvanised the Admiralty into action and a battle squadron was despatched to find von Spee and bring him to action. This time, its ships coaled not at Pernambuco but at St Vincent, off the Abrolhos Islands and at the Falkland Islands. It was while in Port Stanley that the Germans surprised the British and, discovering that they were outgunned, turned tail and, following a chase, were overpowered by Admiral Sturdee's battle cruisers. The *Invincible*, slightly damaged during the battle, called at Pernambuco on the passage back to Britain but took on no coal.

Before the battle of the Falkland Islands, von Spee had ordered 5,000 tons of American coal to be available for his squadron off Pernambuco. Jim recalled that:

'After the Battle ... a steamer with the name Gladstone arrived in the Outer Roads under the Norwegian flag. Her master consigned her to Wilsons and ordered fresh water – we were the only people who could supply this outside the reef. I got suspicious and asked for the ship's papers to be retained. Most fortunately, the delivery pump on the water lighter broke down when it arrived alongside the Gladstone, so she got no water. Before I left the office in the evening, I asked for the ship's papers to put them in a safe. I was then informed that the Master had kept them, so I went to see the [new] Captain of the Port, Captao de Fregata Juliuo Cezar de Noronha Santos, the very best type of naval officer, one of a Brazilian Naval family, with whom I had much to do during his tenure of office. He authorised me to tell the Master of the Gladstone that I wished to see him.

'I went off to the ship early next morning. I asked the Master for his papers. He replied that they were on shore. To this, I said that they were not, that the Captain of the Port desired to see him, and that he has better come ashore with me. He did, and later we were asked to tow an old Brazilian gunboat, lying at the entrance of the harbour as a guardship, to the Outer Roads to prevent the Gladstone sailing. The warship had no steam up, hence the request for a tow. The Gladstone thereafter came inside the breakwater and her cargo of coal was sold.... My conjecture is that the Master of the Gladstone had heard of the destruction of the German squadron off the Falkland Islands, was uncertain what to do and thought if he consigned his ship to a British firm suspicion might be allayed. It is possible, of course, he wanted to be interned rather than captured at sea. I heard later that the German firm of R Petersen & Co. was incensed at what he did.'



Almirante Noronha Santos. WJ Wyllie's watercolour of 'Jangada and lighters, Pernambuco', painted in 1914, surely depicts the scene from one of Craddock's squadron during coaling in the Outer Roads – an extraordinary discovery

The saga of the *Gladstone* continued:

'Some considerable time later, we received a laconic telegram from Furness, Witherby & Co. ... asking us to help a Danish shipmaster to get possession of the Gladstone. ... [but] as soon as orders reached the Captain of the Port to permit the Gladstone, which had been renamed the Nordskov to sail ... these would be countermanded, due

to the influence of the American minister in Rio. [There were North American claimants to the ship.]... This happened two or three times causing much delay, but one evening, Dr Henrique Atunes, the customs despatcher we employed, whom I liked and respected, came to me to say that orders had reached the Capitanía for the release of the ship, that a crew should be signed on at once, and that I should be on hand by 6 sa.m. the next morning when she should sail in case of further trouble. A crew was signed on in the Capitanía, most of whom were Brazilians. I was on the quayside next morning ... and saw the pilot, Manuel Manta, a good man at his job, returning ashore from the Gladstone ... he told me that sailing orders had been countermanded.

'I requested him to return on board and said that I would go and see the Captain of the Port (the Commandante Noronha Santos) at once. I did not know what my reception would be at that early hour, but the Commandante opened his front door in his pyjamas and informed me that he had given orders that the ship could sail. I returned to the quayside and saw her steam past. Dr Atunes informed me later that the Commandante had stated that having issued his permit for the ship to sail, he could not withdraw it. That was typical of the man.... I heard later that an American destroyer met the ex-Gladstone as she was steaming towards the Barbados and presumably the Americans, who had just entered the war, got possession of her ... '

Jim was to meet Noronha Santos later:

'The Commandante afterwards became Almirante Chefe de Esquadra but retired in 1930 when Dr Getulio Vargas seized power. He was not the type to become involved in politics; he looked like the best type of Brazilian Naval Officer. I met him once again after he left Pernambuco, in Rio, about 1929, on a British cruiser, when he was in charge of the Brazilian fleet. Unfortunately, a stupid English woman, when I asked her about a son in England, replied he was not coming back to "this land of bribery and corruption". I said at once "You must not say that" but there was a Brazilian Naval Officer behind me who undoubtedly reported the incident to the Admiral. When I said goodbye to the latter, he remarked to me "Our code of accounts is complicated", which was a most courteous manner of letting me know that he was aware of the woman's remark.'

Jim's memoirs mention the activities of a number of German raiders off the north-east coast of Brazil but he had no contact with them, although he was clearly keeping a very close eye on their activities and passing on information to the master's of British merchant vessels. The cruisers *Dartmouth*, *Gloucester*, *Highflyer* and *Newcastle* all bunkered at Pernambuco during the war and 46 years later, Jim could still remember the names of three of the four captains – Kelly, Buller and Aubrey Smith.

7. The Great War years and after

For most of the war, Jim was on his own in Pernambuco. The climate did not suit Jeannie and, to quote from a letter written in the 1950s, 'I had to get her to England. In consequence, I did not see her for three years as I could not get a relief due to the war.'

But he was busy. Besides that of the *Gladstone*, there were other incidents with German merchant ships trying to pass themselves off as neutrals. As the guardian of the largest stock of coal in the port, Jim found himself in the middle of many of these sagas, working with the captain of the port and local lawyers to ensure that British interests were not harmed. The situation became quite complicated when the United States of Brazil entered the war ahead of the United States of America and American interests tried to lay claim to former German ships while the diplomatic and commercial representatives in Rio tried to override those in Pernambuco.

Throughout this period, Jim was passing information to the Admiralty and, later to the Americans. After the war, an American was the first to write to Wilson's:

I wish to take this opportunity of expressing to you my highest appreciation of the assistance afforded to the American Censorship in Brazil by your Mr John (sic) Burns. On many occasions Mr Burns furnished us very valuable information and at all times was most eager to lend his assistance. Mr Burns impressed me as being one of the most capable men I have met in Brazil and your company is to be highly congratulated in having the services of such a man.

Three months later, the Admiralty wrote. After repeating the Americans' thanks, its letter continued :

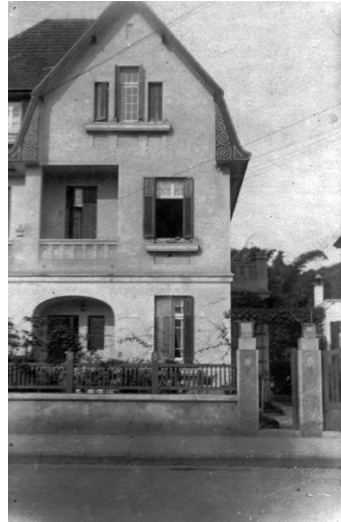
'... It is further stated that on various occasions on which His Majesty's Ships have visited Pernambuco, Mr Burns has always placed himself entirely at the disposal of the Commanding Officer and has been of great assistance. I am to request therefore that you will be good enough to convey to Mr Burns an expression of Their Lordships appreciation of his valuable services.'

If the long separation from Jeannie was difficult, the death of Jim's youngest brother, Walter, must have been devastating. At the outbreak of war he had been working in the Argentine but, at some stage, like so many of his Anglo-Argentine contemporaries, returned to Britain to join up. Commissioned into the King's Shropshire Light Infantry, he was subsequently attached to the Gloucestershire Regiment. It was while serving with them that he was killed in the Battle of Poelcappelle, on the morning of 9 October 1917. His body was never recovered from the Flanders mud. He is remembered on the memorial at Tyne Cot, on the Menin Gate, in the Anglican Cathedral in Buenos Aires and on his parents' headstone in Shalford cemetery. His mother never recovered – she dressed in black for the rest of her life.

By the time Jim received the Admiralty's letter, he had rejoined Jeannie and their daughter in England. From there they returned not to Pernambuco, but to São Paulo from where, in 1923, they moved to Rio. The entry in the *Edinburgh Academy Register* recording this makes makes no mention of whether it was then or later that he became Wilson's General Manager in Brazil.



Walter Burns



The home in São Paulo



Margaret, Robert and Jean

Jim and Jeannie had two more children – Robert, born in 1916, and Margaret, in 1921. All three children were sent to boarding schools in England. Jean went to Tudor Hall; Robert to Locker’s Park and thence to Stowe; and Margaret to Branksome Hilders and thence to Farringdon’s.



The Tamandaré flats and hall



The company Packard and Joaquim

In Rio, the Burns lived in an upper floor flat in the Rua Almirante Tamandaré, in the Flamengo district. Most of the rooms overlooked the tree canopy over the street below but the entrance hall – a generously wide, cool interior space, filled with the old furniture so loved by Jim – ended in a balcony with a view of Guanabara Bay. It was from here that Jim would observe the comings and goings of the Royal Mail, Blue Star and other British cargo liners. As with the warships in Pernambuco, he knew all the captains’ names and, in letters to his grandson, would always include these when referring to a ship, as with ‘the *Highland Princess*, Captain Hooper’. Besides the pleasant flat, he enjoyed the exclusive use of a large Packard drop-head saloon driven by an equally large and jovial Portuguese chauffeur, Joaquim. By the time he retired, aged 53, in 1940, Jim was secretary and treasurer of the newly formed British Community Council.

8. The Second World War and last years

Concerned for his widowed mother, Jim returned to Britain in 1940. It is likely that he left Rio after the news that his son, Robert, had been shot down over the Netherlands on the day that the Germans invaded, 10 May 1940. Robert, an RAF Flight Lieutenant, had been piloting a Bristol Blenheim bomber and was shot down by flak. He was to be a prisoner of war for five years, mainly in Stalag Luft III. He took part in the preparations for The Great Escape but did not get out himself.



Robert Burns, bomber pilot Jim, Home Guard private and Willingdon Mission member

It was at this time that the Foreign Office and the newly formed Ministry of Economic Warfare became concerned with developments in South and Central America. It was resolved to send a mission under a former Viceroy of India, Lord Willingdon. It was reported to the House of Commons that:

The purpose of the mission ... will be to study at first hand the maintenance and improvement of mutual exchanges of trade under the difficult conditions of war. The mission has been instructed to explain British economic and contraband control policy in the countries which it visits. In order to counteract the unscrupulous efforts of Axis propaganda it will show that we have been able to maintain our export trade under war conditions, and it will explain the fundamental necessities underlying our treatment of the problem of purchases and payments.

Every country in South America was to be visited. Preparing for his mission, Willingdon somehow got to hear about Jim's presence in London. The Foreign Office had perhaps consulted Wilson's, the leading British agency of its kind in South America, and been directed to Jim. And someone in Wilson's – the letter is unsigned – wrote this:

My dear Catto,

I enclose a short history of our late General Manager in the Brazils – he is a Scotchman, and very modest, and that is why his record is rather laconic. I understand that Lord W. has formed a high opinion of Burns, but Burns, stupidly I think, is too modest to approach him about temporary employment here. You can rest assured that I am not trying to get him a job for the sake of remuneration, but he naturally would like to have sufficient to live on while in this country and separated from his family. I do not suppose that there is any Britisher in

*England, to-day, who has a more complete knowledge of the Brazilian character, their habits, their laws etc. and I feel sure that any department connected with South America, securing his services, would find him an asset – he is in his early 50's, and has worn well – a charming personality. With our love to you all,
Yours sincerely,*

Following this letter, Jim was appointed to the Mission. It also appears (from a note found on the reverse of a framed contemporary caricature of Jim) that he was formally nominated for the Mission by the Mining Association and British Coal Exporters Federation (of which Wilson's would have been members). Hiding somewhere in the family's archives, there is Jim's extremely candid and amusing account of his time with the mission. Appended to it there is a note that it is not to be shown to anyone outside the family. But, if we can't refer to that account, there is another one, delivered by Jim to the British Community Committee in Rio, following his return in 1941:

'I had a long and uneventful journey to England ...I saw many wonderful sights but the most beautiful to my mind was the Hebrides and Skye on a sunny February morning. I cannot say any more because I must keep in mind the poster one sees everywhere in England "Be like Dad; Keep Mum'. On my journey to London by train, I had my first experience of an air raid warning, and ten days after my arrival, the hotel I was in was hit by high explosive. Nobody was hurt but houses on both sides of the street were shattered. I was profoundly impressed by the attitude of the women – many of whom were old. There was no fuss or talk, and nobody made for the air raid shelter. I learnt in the next raid that hot water pipes ran through it! Women on the staff were going through the upper rooms with torches during the raid to make sure there were no fires. ... The quarters of the staff had been wrecked but they carried on just as if nothing had happened. Instead, I insured my life – £5,000 maximum for £5 per month premium.

'I saw two bad raids, but on both occasions everybody carried on as if nothing had happened and it was surprising how quickly conditions were restored to normal. The spirit of the people was quite admirable and I travelled with people from the East End and heard them talk, and I saw something of what they had suffered. The destruction of churches was sad to see. They seemed to have been singled out. I was in a suburb and saw an old house that had been wrecked, with a notice on the gate "Removed to 21, Tranquil Vale" [This was in Blackheath, near where his parents had lived before he left home, in 1904.] A business had been carried on there for more than a hundred years.

'Everybody seemed to be doing war work. So I joined the Home Guard and I found them efficient. I was still a recruit when I left them after four months, but that may have been my fault. The men in it were of all ages and classes. One fellow recruit had the C.M.G. and O.B.E, another was a most humorous cockney boy whose job was top man of the demolition squad, another, an educated man, had beachcombed in Callao in 1912 and he was one of our most efficient pioneers. I met also an elderly American and an old gentleman who looked like a portrait of the Iron Duke in old age. Our sergeant used to refer to him as such when he was out of earshot, but he could run and he could shoot. ...

'Some of us went to a weekend camp in a lorry with a number of tough Hammersmith boys. On the return trip our transport arrangements seemed to have failed so I spoke to a lorry driver who took us back free of charge and insisted on dropping us in our district – which was right out of his way on a Sunday night. He was a transport corporal in the H.G. The

short period in camp was strenuous, particularly as the weather was abnormally hot, although I spoke of it as wintry! Mr Atlee inaugurated the camp, and on parade there were casualties owing to the heat. A tin hat is not a sun helmet. General Sergison Brooke told us that if the invasion came about, no prisoners were wanted. Our drill instructor, a hard man who had been in the military police and Dunkirk told us the same in less polished terms. After all, the Germans are vermin.

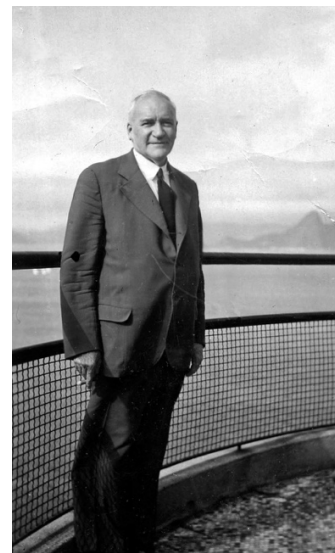
'The manner in which people at home [i.e. Britain] have sunk self and do their job whatever it may be made me sorry to leave. I believe the forgetting of self by the people of Great Britain will contribute more than anything else to the winning of the war. My journey across the Atlantic was uneventful but interesting. But before I leave England I must mention what a São Paulo boy in Air Force uniform told me. When he and another São Paulo boy went up for their national registration they were told to go into a certain room. They knocked and an elderly man writing at a desk looked up and said "South Americans". My friend said "Yes, but how do you know?" The reply was "You are always so polite." I must say that I found real kindness and helpfulness everywhere in Great Britain and under all circumstances. And talking of that I would like to add that the kindness and helpfulness of people in the States as soon as they recognised one was British was quite touching ...'



Jim and Jeannie, c. 1941 ...



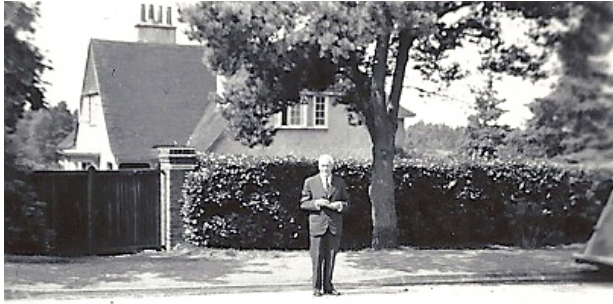
with Robert, 1945



Jim, c.1946

Returning to Rio, Jim joined the British Embassy as Second Secretary (temporary) in the Commercial Department. The offices were also in Flamengo – a short walk away from the flat, past the gardens of the Catete (Presidential) Palace. As a 'retirement' job, it must have suited him well, drawing upon his knowledge and expertise. In 1945, the Brazilian Foreign Ministry awarded him a commemorative medal on the centenary of the Barão do Rio Branco's birth. Two years later, he was awarded the O.B.E. in the King's Birthday Honours. And on the 24th September 1949, the Foreign Office wrote:

'Upon your retirement as Second Secretary (Temporary) at Rio de Janeiro I am directed by Mr Atlee to convey to you an expression of his warm appreciation of the valuable service which you have rendered to His Majesty's Government during the past nine years. Your devotion to duty at all times and in particular during the recent Trade negotiations has earned the appreciation of the officers with whom you have served and you take with you on your retirement sincere good wishes for the future.'



Jim outside Greenway and ...



(hat in hand) outside the Wellington Hotel

That year, Jim and Jeannie returned to Britain and bought their first home (they had always rented before). Greenway was located in a quiet road in Beaconhill, not far from Haslemere where Jim's sister, Lita, lived. The house was set on a sloping site with views over the golf course in the valley below. Jeannie had her first garden where she seemed to be particularly successful in cultivating chives, used with soft white cheese to fill sandwiches. Jim had a room to himself where, in a fug of cigar smoke, he spent many contented hours surrounded by his pictures, and the small but select collection of Portuguese colonial, European and English silver which he had accumulated over the years. He continued his long-standing subscription to *Blackwoods Magazine* and dipped into old copies of *Sea Breezes*, the Pacific Steam Navigation Company's house magazine, depicting a world of sail and steam which he had known but was now rapidly vanishing. Every now and then, he would visit his favourite museum, the Victoria and Albert.

Around 1959 disaster struck. Wilson's, for whom Jim had worked for nearly 40 years, reneged on the pension arrangements upon which their former employees depended. The company had suffered from a recession in South America and the change from coal to oil for ship propulsion. Today, the company, the largest of its kind in Brazil, is locally owned and run. Greenway was sold and the proceeds used to purchase the annuities which enabled Jim and Jeannie to move and live out their days in the Wellington Hotel in Tunbridge Wells, close to their older daughter, Jean, in Sevenoaks. It was there that he typed many of the memoirs upon which this account is based. The pictures and the silver were moved to an attic room in Sevenoaks where he would, from time to time, spend time in silent enjoyment. He died, aged 77, in 1964. Jeannie survived another 9 years.

9. Envoi

The White and Red Ensigns ruled the waves when Jim started his first job. He loved the ships and admired their crews. His favourite was the graceful, clipper-bowed, Royal Mail steamer *Magdalena* on which he returned to Britain in 1897. The Royal Mail or ‘Mala Real’, as it was known to the Brazilians, had started a mail service to Brazil in 1851. The quality of its ships and service exemplified, to Brazilians, the best of Britain. But in 1949, the very year in which Jim and Jeannie retired to England, Royal Mail – and Britain’s – reputation in Brazil suffered a terrible blow. Another *Magdalena*, a beautiful Belfast-built cargo liner, was wrecked on her maiden voyage while approaching Rio. The lifeboats pulled in to Copacabana beach and oranges from her cargo washed up on the shores around the entrance to Guanabara bay. Lloyds paid out the largest-ever compensation for a marine accident. Careless navigation had irreparably damaged British prestige.

Something else happened in that year. *Os Ingleses no Brasil*, by the Brazilian anthropologist and historian, Gilberto Freyre, was published. I don’t think Jim can have known about it – he doesn’t seem to have owned a copy – and an English translation, *The English in Brazil*, did not appear till 2011. The British had played a significant part in the emergence of Brazil as an independent nation as opposed to a colony of Portugal. It was they who, in 1808, persuaded the Portuguese royal family to leave Lisbon ahead of Napoleon’s troops and it was the Royal Navy which escorted them to Brazil. In return, the British gained a huge advantage in terms of trade and, for the rest of the century, were the dominant mercantile power. Freyre explains how the English influenced Brazilian culture, clothing and customs.

Jim Burns, of course, remembered his Galloway roots and considered himself a Scot. Argentine-born, he demonstrated his loyalty to Britain in a way typical of so many fellow South American ‘Anglos’. And, working in Brazil at a time when Britain’s power, battered by two world wars, was steadily declining, he maintained what he saw as the standards of a great nation. A courteous man, he respected his Brazilian colleagues and friends, standing to attention when national anthems were played and always dressing formally. Dependent on sea travel, granted home leave at intervals of not less than three – sometimes, five – years, and often tied to a single company for their entire working lives, Jim and his generation lived a life a world away from that of today’s ‘ex-pats’. His, in particular, was a life well lived.



The last photograph and ...



the best (c. 1913?, aged 26)
