

# Brazilian–British friendship

By **JACQUES ARNOLD**

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**JACQUES ARNOLD** was Chairman of the British Brazilian Parliamentary Group during his time as Member of Parliament for Gravesham. He was previously Deputy Representative of Midland Bank in Brazil, and Thomas Cook’s Regional Director for Latin America. In his parliamentary role, he addressed a committee of the Brazilian Congress during the constitutional referendum campaign, and led the British parliamentary delegation to the IPU Environment Conference in Brasilia. Since leaving parliament in 1997, he has been adviser to a range of British companies in their Latin American activities.

The visit to Brazil of Prime Minister David Cameron builds upon a historic relationship and emphasises the importance now being given to it by both sides. It was only in 1992 that a British Prime Minister finally made it to Brazil – John Major to attend the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. He returned fascinated by what he had found. Tony Blair followed in 2001, making the first separate bilateral visit by a British Prime Minister, and in 2009, Gordon Brown made a fleeting visit on his way to the G20 Summit in Pittsburg. Margaret Thatcher, despite annual good intentions, only made it to Brazil after retiring as Prime Minister. On viewing the scale and development of São Paulo, amazed, she asked the fabled question: “Why didn’t anyone tell me?”

Brazil was discovered in 1500 by the Portuguese navigator Pedro Álvares Cabral, and settled down to three centuries of Portuguese colonial rule, which gradually expanded southwards to the River Plate and up the Amazon, dislodging colonisation attempts by the French and Dutch. Sugar and gold were the staples of the economy.

All this changed in 1807, when Napoleon invaded

Portugal. Dom João, the Prince Regent, abandoned the field, and resolved to transfer his mad mother, Queen Maria I, and her court to Brazil. Inevitably, it was the British Royal Navy that made this possible. Admiral Sir Sidney Smith was sent to Lisbon to salvage the Court, and to prevent the Portuguese fleet falling into French hands. He escorted them to Madeira, and from there a British Squadron under Commodore Graham Moore, brother of John Moore of subsequent Coruña fame, in HMS Marlborough, escorted them to Salvador, from where the Regent announced the opening of Brazilian ports to foreign commerce, and then onwards to Rio de Janeiro, where the court established itself. In 1815, following the Congress of Vienna, João declared the establishment of the United Kingdom of Portugal, Brazil and the Algarves, becoming himself King João VI, three months later on the death of his mother.

In 1820, the Liberal revolution in Portugal caused King João VI to return to Portugal to secure the metropolitan part of his United Kingdom, leaving his son Pedro behind as Regent of Brazil. Inevitably the Lisbon government began rolling back the autonomy of the latter. This finally led to exasperation on the part of the Brazilians, and their Regent finally called



The Portuguese Royal Family arrives at Rio de Janeiro under Royal Navy escort, 1808



for “Independence or Death”, the historic cry of Ipiranga, in 1822. Within three months, and upon the advice of the Brazilian Provinces, he declared himself Emperor Pedro I.

Portugal’s immediate reaction was to view these events as a rebellion, and fighting broke out, particularly in the northeast, with the Portuguese forces finally surrendering in 1823. Ironically, the last Portuguese force to surrender to the Brazilians was at Montevideo, then capital of the Brazilian province of Cisplatina.

The defeat of the Portuguese forces was largely achieved by the nascent Brazilian navy, which had developed out of various local ships of the Portuguese fleet. In the absence of professional officers, the Emperor recruited Thomas Lord Cochrane, a former Royal Navy officer, who was returning from his successes in the liberation of Chile, where he had been Vice-Admiral and Commander in Chief of the Chilean Navy, instrumental in the independence of that country and Peru. He assembled a force, and defeated the Portuguese in Bahia, Pará and Maranhão. A grateful Emperor created him Marquess of Maranhão. Characteristically, he departed Brazil in a row over prize money, and then proceeded to play a part in the naval battles for Greek independence. He finally was rehabilitated into the Royal Navy, ending up as a full admiral, Commander-in-Chief of the North America & West Indies Station, and succeeding his father as Earl of Dondonald.

The Brazilian Navy has maintained its close friendship with the Royal Navy ever since. A succession of ships has been bought from Britain, wooden-walls, iron-clads, and before the first world war, two Battleships, the Minas Gerais and the São Paulo, built at Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Barrow-in-Furness respectively. A third,

intended to be the Rio de Janeiro, was disposed of on the slipway to Turkey, only to be seized by Britain on the outbreak of war, and serving as HMS Agincourt at the Battle of Jutland. A second world war aircraft carrier, HMS Vengeance, was bought by the Brazilian Navy in 1960, and served for 41 years, becoming the world’s oldest serving aircraft carrier. A further succession of warships has been acquired from Britain, including four Type 22 frigates from the Royal Navy, and most recently three corvettes from BAE Systems. Close cooperation continues between the two navies.

The 1808 events resulted in Britain appointing a Consul-General in Rio de Janeiro, Sir James Gambier. The opening of the ports resulted in British trade and investment flooding in. The Rothschilds became bankers to the Emperor and his government. British companies developed the railways and ocean telegraph cables. The London & Brazilian Bank was founded in 1862, and in 1923 merged with the London & River Plate Bank to form the Bank of London & South America. British companies developed water, gas, electricity and tramway companies across the country, most of which ended in twentieth century nationalisation. A wide range of others followed, including Vestey’s, Wellcome, J&P Coats, Unilever and Shell. In more recent times, the advent of British Gas and HSBC.

In 1822, a full British Ambassador was appointed, Sir Robert Gordon. Following the establishment of Brasilia as the Federal Capital in 1960, a British Embassy was also established there, originally constructed of breeze blocks and corrugated iron. The

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Top:  
Admiral Lord Cochrane  
Marquess of Maranhão

Below:  
British Embassy, Brasilia



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Rio de Janeiro post only converted to a Consulate-General in 1973, when the Embassy in Brasilia became full-time, although the new permanent buildings were only inaugurated in 1983.

Cultural and educational contacts are strong. There is a long tradition of British schools in Brazil. St Paul's School in São Paulo, since 1927 on its present site, and the British School in Rio de Janeiro, founded in 1924, provide British education up to university entrance. The network of Cultura Inglesa institutes in upwards of 70 Brazilian cities, provides language tuition to a high standard, in addition to cultural exchanges facilitated with the British Council. More recently, the Brazilian Government's Science without Frontiers programme, will result in 10,000 Brazilian students coming to the UK to advance their studies.

A little known aspect of the relationship is the Brazilian Armed Forces' participation during the Second World War. As a result of U-boat sinkings of Brazilian merchant vessels, public opinion resulted in a declaration of war in 1942. The Brazilian Navy provided convoy escorts as far as Gibraltar. The Army and Air Force sent the Brazilian Expeditionary Force (FEB) of 25,700 men to Italy to serve alongside a multitude of national forces under the command of General Alexander. They fought in a series of battles, culminating in the battle of Monte Castello, in which they suffered severe losses, not least due to the intense cold. Visitors to Rio de Janeiro can see the impressive monument to their endeavours and its museum on the Flamengo waterfront. The display includes a plaque from the Scots Guards paying tribute to their comrades-in-arms.

The personal contacts of the Royal Family have been

relatively recent. Whilst King George V visited much of South America in HMS Bacchante in 1882, he never called into Brazilian ports. Edward, Prince of Wales, later Duke of Windsor, made the first visit, as part of his world tours in the 1920s. It was only in 1968 that the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh made the first ever State Visit. Since then, there have been numerous visits by the Prince of Wales, in 1991 accompanied by Princess Diana, and since by Prince Andrew, Princess Anne, and this year by Prince Harry. We all look forward to a potential visit by the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, whose appetite for South America is no doubt whetted by their individual participations in Operation Raleigh in southern Chile.

We have a long-standing relationship between our two countries. It was however weakened by the Second World War and its aftermath, damaged by disposals and nationalisations. Post-war, Britain has concentrated on its relationship with the United States, the Commonwealth and Europe, to the detriment of our historic friendships in Latin America.

In his landmark speech, the Foreign Secretary, William Hague, has declared "Britain's retreat from Latin America is over, and it is time for an advance to begin". He has been true to his word. A brand-new Consulate-General has opened in Recife, in addition to reopening Embassies elsewhere in Latin America. Jeremy Browne, the Minister of State has made frequent visits, and the Foreign Secretary visited in January, saying he welcomed "Brazil's growing impact on the political and economic landscape of the world". The visit of the Prime Minister this month can only add to the growing impetus in this important relationship. **F**



Prince Charles and Camilla enjoy the Rio Samba