The Blandy Company of Madeira

John Blandy arrived in Madeira in 1808. The business he founded in 1811 is now run by the seventh generation of Blandys. In the 214 years since its foundation, the Blandy family has been involved in a wide range of activities, including general importing; wine production and export; coal bunkering and as agent for several important steamship lines; flour milling and breadmaking; building-lime production; newspaper proprietorship; banking; the operation of launches, tugs, and a ship repair yard, both in Madeira and Las Palmas; electronics; hotel ownership and management; and other tourism-related activities, including a golf course. Over the years, its investments have taken it to mainland Portugal, the Canary Islands, Francophone West Africa, Malaysia, the UK, and Brazil, but throughout this time Madeira has remained the central core.

To celebrate its first 200 years, the company issued a book entitled *The Blandys of Madeira: 1811-2011*. This was written by Marcus Binney and published by Francis Lincoln of London.[1] This article is largely a summary of that fascinating book, concentrating mainly on the family's business activities and following the ups and downs of the heads of the family. The British Historical Society is grateful to Michael and Christopher Blandy for their approval to publish this article and their comments on an earlier draft.[2]

By Andrew Shepherd

John Blandy

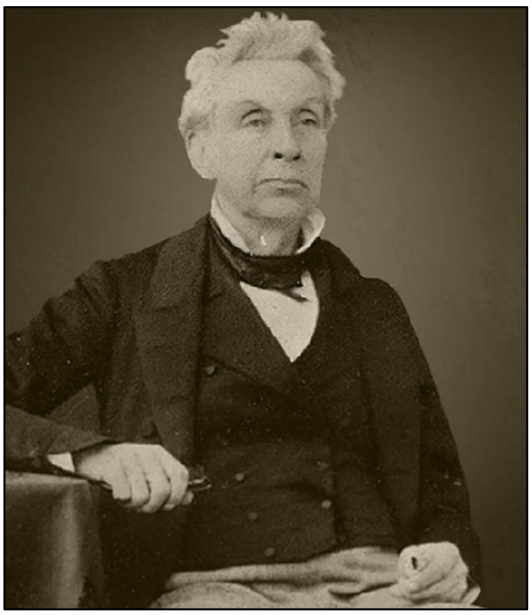
John Blandy came from a Dorset farming family that had fallen upon hard times even before his father, Charles, died in 1803. One of nine children of Charles and Elizabeth (née Davis), six boys and three girls, John decided to head for Madeira in 1808 at the age of 24. He arrived there a short time after the island had been taken by British forces under the command of William Beresford, later to become commander of the Portuguese army. This occupation, which ended in 1814, was seen as necessary by the British to protect the routes for shipping to India and the Americas during the Napoleonic War. An important victualling station, Madeira could not be allowed to fall into the hands of the French.

Blandy landed armed with a letter of introduction to Messrs Newton, Gordon, Murdoch & Co. The signatory of the letter is unclear but the letter was written at the request of Richard Fuller Esq. and stated that John was travelling because of ill health and desired employment as a bookkeeper. The company had been founded by Francis Newton, a Scot, who arrived in Madeira in 1745. Francis was joined by his younger brother, Thomas, by Thomas Gordon and, in 1791, by Thomas Murdoch, when the business came to be called Newton, Gordon, Murdoch & Co., which still exists, as Cossart Gordon & Co.[3] By 1850, the company was said to be shipping half the island's wine production. As in Lisbon and Oporto, the 70 or so British merchants had formed a British Factory. They were to start their own cemetery in 1770 and build their own church, Holy Trinity, in 1822.

John went back to England in 1810 to marry Jennet Burden at St. Andrew's in Holborn. The couple had six children who survived into adulthood.[4] They returned to Madeira in 1811, together with two of his brothers, Thomas and George, and in that year the family business was founded. It appears that their business expanded rapidly right from the beginning. In April 1811, Thomas was back in England seeking orders and arranging letters of introduction and credit. A few months later he was in the Caribbean. We learn from letters between John and Thomas that the shipment to the West Indies had not been insured, a decision that increased the profit but was a significant risk. Had anything happened to the ship, the Blandys might now be just a small footnote in the history of Madeira instead of the

[1] *The Blandys of Madeira: 1811-2011* by Marcus Binney is available from Amazon.es or Amazon.co.uk. A copy is also available in the Society's library.
[2] Thanks are also due to Richard Mayson for his review of a draft.
[3] https://www.cossartgordon.com/philosophy.html
[4] For a family tree, see https://www.blandy.com/en/200-years.html

significant family they have become. This was recognised then by John Blandy who wrote that "it was too great a risk to run on so large an amount".[5]



John Blandy

Charles Ridpath Blandy

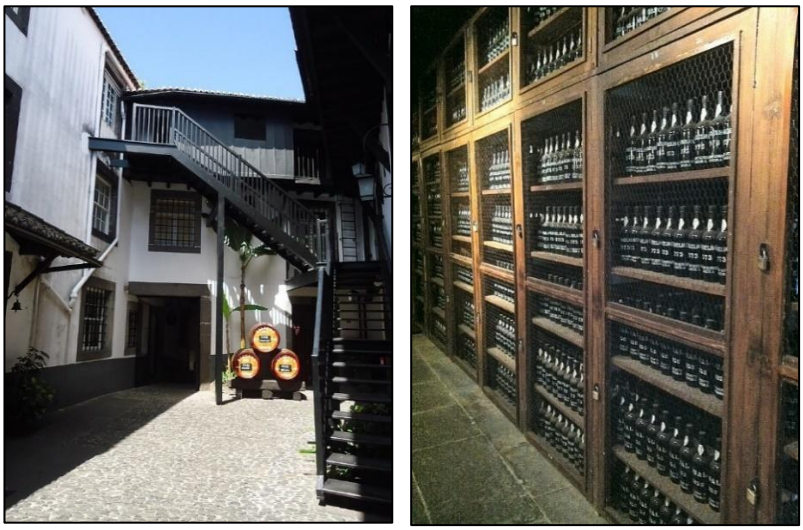
With the interruption of trade between the American colonies and mainland Europe, because of the Napoleonic Wars, Madeira took advantage of the situation to sell its wines. It was not long before John and Thomas were importing, or getting ready to import, smoked and pickled herring, butter, cheese, olive oil, brandy, candles, and crockery. It was common for the payment of shipping charges for such imports to be made in wine.

Some of the company's supplies were also simply purchased from vessels arriving in Funchal that were hoping to make speculative sales, such as a schooner from Portsmouth, New Hampshire in April 1812 from which John purchased flour, beef, pork, butter, and lard. At the same time, he was exporting Madeira wine to Jamaica and the Virgin Islands. Butter, shipped in barrels, was particularly in short supply in Madeira and John was actively seeking suppliers from Cork, Liverpool, or London. In June 1812, the United States declared war on Britain. This led to a blockade of the USA by the Royal Navy. John was keen to stress to Thomas in London that "if there be peace do not touch provisions of any kind"[6], aware no doubt that soon after peace ships would be arriving in Madeira from the USA. Peace was finally declared in February 1815.

John was also trading in fabrics. Paisley patterns were popular in Madeira and white cotton hose and lace were always in demand. Meanwhile, business in the USA was booming within a year of the peace and the Blandys were shipping brandy and wine across the Atlantic. In the other direction, cranberries were one of the items they were importing into Madeira. However, despite the apparent growing prosperity of the business, all was not well in the relationship between the brothers. In early 1820, John announced that he was ending the partnership with Thomas and that he was thinking of setting up business in the Cape of Good Hope or New South Wales. Thomas, meanwhile, was considering becoming a wine merchant in Baltimore. George would later go to Brazil, but failed to make a success of his business there. Family relations were eventually restored, however, and around 1846 John visited Thomas in America, returning to live in Madeira until his death. Having purchased *Quinta de Santa Luzia* in 1826 he had built a house with beach frontage at Santa Cruz and another house at Santo António da Serra and offices at Rua de S. Francisco. His decision to buy up properties

[5] Binney, p. 20
[6] Binney, p. 23

near to his offices led to what is known today as Blandy's Wine Lodge. With their unique temperature and humidity conditions, the buildings make a significant contribution to the ageing of high-quality Madeira wines.



Blandy's Wine Lodge[7]

Charles Ridpath Blandy

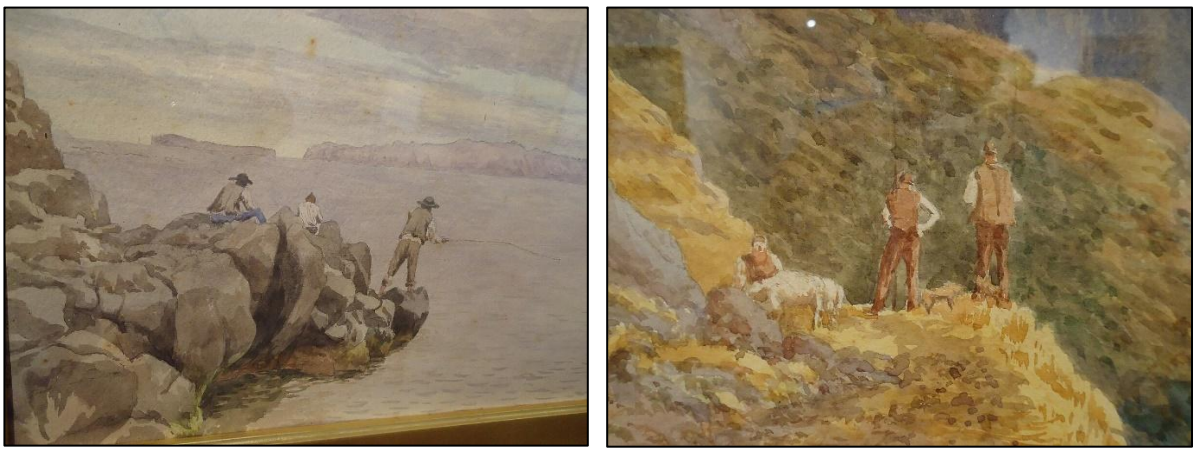
Charles Ridpath Blandy, the eldest son of John and Jennet, was born in 1812 in Madeira. He married Mary-Ann Symonds on the island. She came from one of Madeira's English families and was born four years before him. By the time of their wedding in London in 1835, he was already trading in wine on his own account. The couple, who had ten children, were to move into a house at Santo António, which today is part of Funchal, so that Charles could ride daily to work and back. He became head of the company on his father's death in 1855. In Madeira the company kept the name of his father, as John Blandy & Sons, but traded under Charles' name in London. Charles seems to have travelled far less than had the first generation of Blandys in Madeira, presumably because business contacts were by this time already well established. Even so, it was far from plain sailing, as shown by the fact that some other British-owned companies were going out of business.

By the death of his father, the company had already ventured into many others areas beyond exporting wine and importing supplies for the people of Madeira. To make building lime, it had invested in limestone from *Ilhéu da Cal,* which lies some 400 metres southeast of Porto Santo, where there were many quarries.[8] It provided coal bunkering services to the many steamships passing through Funchal port and worked as agents for shipping companies. In the 1860s, the company was working with the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company; the African Steam Navigation Company; South American and General Steam Navigation; the Union Steam Ship Company; the North Europe Steam Navigation Company; European and American Steam Ship Navigation, and the Diamond Steam Navigation Company. Blandy's had also begun to provide banking services by cashing Letters of Credit for English visitors. During the American Civil War (1861-65), Charles traded with both sides. For example, he surreptitiously supplied coal to a Confederate Cruiser, the *Shenandoah*, at the Desertas Islands, southeast of Funchal.

The third son of Charles and Mary-Anne, Raleigh Blandy, studied engineering in Glasgow and became a marine engineer, rising to chief engineer for the Wilson Line of steamers before returning to Madeira

[7] https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Blandy_family_(Madeira)
[8] Correia, p. 196

to take over responsibility for the Blandy engineering business, ship repair yard and coastal fleet. He became a talented painter and sketcher, and his work is to be found in the Museum of Natural History in Funchal. An exhibition devoted to his paintings was held there in 2012.[9]



Paintings by Charles Frederick Raleigh Blandy

In 1852, Madeira was affected by *Oidium*, the disease that causes powdery mildew in grapes. The 70 British houses exporting wine in 1850 were reduced to 15 by 1855, most heading for Spain. Charles and others who stayed bought up much of their stock, borrowing heavily for this purpose. It is estimated that he accumulated 5,000 pipes (480 litres per pipe). It was probably at this time that he had purchased the old Funchal theatre and converted it into an additional wine store. A report from the late 1870s stated that these wines were held in at least 40 stores, "connected by passages, stairs, landings, and open entrances in massive stone walls".[10]

Concerned about Charles Ridpath's indebtedness, his two eldest sons, John Burden and Graham John, formed Blandy Brothers & Co. with the intention of taking over their father's business. They reached an agreement with their father for the gradual transfer of his business activities to them, starting with the coal, ship, and steamer business in 1862 and ending in 1868 with his involvement in the wine trade on the island. However, Charles failed to honour the agreement.

In 1865 the two sons left the business and headed to South Africa, but their business ventures there were far from successful. They returned to Funchal in 1876 to find their father's activities in dire straits. A new agreement was reached in 1878 for the brothers to take over the business, paying for it over seven years. Ironically, it was their father's apparently misguided purchase of large quantities of wine during the *Oidium* outbreak that ensured the company's survival. In retrospect, Charles may have even saved the whole of the Madeira wine industry as his purchase of vast quantities avoided panic sales overseas by other merchants.

John Burden Blandy

Charles Blandy died in 1879 at the Great Western Hotel, Paddington, while on a business trip. Shortly afterwards, his second son, Graham John, also died. This caused major problems for John Burden, who had to continue to repay the debt from the 1878 agreement with his father as well as compensate the heirs of his brother Graham for his share of the company. Matters were not helped by the fact that their father's Will disinherited the two elder sons, dividing the estate between Charles' other eight children. John's appeal to the family members who benefitted fell largely on deaf ears, although he was given

[9] Binney, p. 34; and https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Nature_of_Madeira_through_the_paintbrush_of_Charles_Frederick_Raleigh_Blandy

[10] Correia, p.188

additional time to pay, in part because of the need to collect all the debts owed to his father.[11] Among other things, he alleged that his father had "systematically appropriated" Graham's earnings. The lack of support from the family led to continued animosity, particularly with Dr. Michael Grabham, husband of John Burden's sister, Mary-Anne, who stood to benefit from the extensive collection of bottled wines that had been built up by Charles.[12]

Notwithstanding these financial difficulties, John continued to prosper. It appears that he was able to buy both his father's house at *Quinta Santa Luiza* and the company's business premises in Rua S. Francisco, which continue to be used to this day. In 1878 he had bought the best lime kiln in Madeira, the *Forno de Santa Catarina*. In 1879 he managed to obtain a virtual monopoly of the coal bunkering business in Madeira. Coal in bags was supplied to visiting steamships either from warehouses or from hulks anchored in the bay. One of the hulks had been the former clipper, *Red Jacket*, which in its early years had set speed records between Liverpool and New York.[13] Purchased by Blandy's in 1883, she was wrecked by heavy seas two years later. Nothing was wasted in Madeira and wood from the vessel was incorporated into Blandy buildings. A further venture at this time was to install the first water pipes in Madeira, to run water from a pure source to the harbour to supply vessels, and to Blandy's offices. Previously, water had been transported in barrels.[14]

Staircase incorporating wood from the *Red Jacket*

In 1880, Raleigh (Charles Frederick Raleigh), the painter, became a partner and John Burden also strengthened the management by inviting Maurice, the brother of his first wife, Margarette Faber, to become a partner. Maurice worked on developing German business connections before he had a stroke and had to retire. Margarette had died in 1877 and in 1882 John married Alice Gwendolen Berrington. He had six children with Margarette and three with Alice. In 1885 he purchased one of Madeira's great estates, the *Quinta do Palheiro*, from the 2nd Count of Carvalhal, who had been a bit of a spendthrift and fallen on hard times. John and Alice became known for their lavish hospitality there.

[11] Correia, p. 204
[12] Binney, p. 44
[13] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Jacket_(clipper)
[14] Correia, p. 214

John Burden and the six children he had with Margarette (d. 1877)

In 1886 John Burden set up a coal bunkering firm in Las Palmas in the Canaries. He built lighters in Madeira and sent them, together with some trusted Portuguese staff, down to Las Palmas, which was a more important bunkering location than Madeira, handling five times as much coal in 1912.[15] In 1888 or 1889 he sent his son, Percy George, to run the business there. Things went well until one night Percy was attacked on his way home. He never fully recovered and died in 1902. He was replaced in Las Palmas by John's third son, Charles Maurice who, together with a cousin, managed the business until World War II. In 1902 John signed an agreement with his three main competitors in the coal-bunkering business in Funchal, Las Palmas, Tenerife, and St. Vincent, Cape Verde, to fix the market share of each company. This was designed to stabilise market prices although these days it would probably be regarded as a cartel. Around this time John also became involved in flour milling. In 1896, Blandy's had acquired the *Diário de Notícias da Madeira,* which had been founded two decades earlier. The company still retains a 12 percent share in the paper.

In 1889, John Burden took advantage of the presence in Madeira of the architects George Somers Clarke and John Thomas Micklethwaite, who designed Reid's Hotel. For his land at the *Quinta do Palheiro* they designed a house described by Binney as a "wonderful embodiment of the romance of far-flung empire". He and his wife moved into the new house in 1891. It had excellent views of the harbour, allowing John to monitor incoming shipping, as well as the work of his coal and water lighters and his steam coastal fleet that supplied communities around the Madeira islands. Sadly, in 1902 the *Palheiro* house burnt down. A replacement was built, faithful to the original designs. Nevertheless, John Burden Blandy increasingly spent his time out of Madeira: his wife liked to travel and his failing health led to them spending time in spa towns such as Vichy. He died in 1912.

[15] Minchinton, Walter. *Britain and Madeira to 1914*, in "Actas do I Colóquio Internacional de História da Madeira", Funchal, 1986

Quinta do Palheiro

King D. Carlos at the *Quinta*, 1901

John Ernest Blandy

John Ernest, son of John Burden and Margarette, was born in 1866 in Durban, South Africa, during the period when John Burden, his brother Graham, and their families had left Madeira following disagreements with their father. They returned when he was aged four. After completing school, John Ernest spent time in France, becoming friendly with the champagne-producing Henriot family. This led to the establishment of Blandy Frères in Rheims and the partly successful attempt of Madame Louis Henriot to promote Madeira wines in France.

John returned to work with the family company in Madeira in about 1865. Not wishing to live with his father, his second wife and three young children, he leased a *quinta* and led a bachelor life, together with the young sons of other leading English families in Madeira, including the Cossarts, Johnny Welsh, Webster Gordon, and Harry Hinton.[16] He married Elinor Reeder in Baltimore, US in 1901, having met her when she accompanied her father, captain of the sail training ship, *St Mary's*, when it visited Madeira. Elinor was an enthusiastic gardener and, together, they greatly improved the *Palheiro* estate.

John Ernest Blandy and his son John Reeder, 1929

Madeira's exporters were in the practice of accepting delayed payment for their consignments of wine. The First World War therefore caused them serious difficulties, particularly those who exported to Germany and Russia. But demand rose in other countries, such as the UK and Scandinavia, as importers tried to replace supplies from Germany. The main problem faced by the shippers in Madeira was lack

[16] Shepherd, Andrew. *Sugar in Madeira and the Hinton Question*. BHSP Newsletter 14, 2022. https://www.bhsportugal.org/library/articles/sugar-in-madeira-and-the-hinton-question

of ships or, rather, lack of shippers willing to risk their vessels when there was danger of being attacked by the German navy. U-boats were in operation at the beginning of the war and a French cable-laying vessel was sunk in Funchal harbour in 1917. A related problem faced by farmers was the limited supply of sulphur, widely used to counter powdery mildew. 1917 was an exceptionally poor year, when many bunches of grapes were mildewed.

Madeira was a coaling station for the British navy during the war but the Blandys did not get the contract. In Madeira, coal was in short supply, and the islands' pine forests were decimated to power the sugar factory run by the Hintons as well as the Blandys' wine stores. Enterprising Madeirans realised that quite a lot of coal would have fallen into Funchal harbour over the years and started to "mine" it. Blandy's eventually agreed to pay these scavengers 50% of the commercial price of coal.[17]

Problems were also encountered with the supply of alcohol necessary to fortify Madeira Wine. To benefit Harry Hinton's sugar factory, parliament had forbidden the use of wine brandy, requiring cane alcohol to be used instead. To obtain additional concessions from the Portuguese government, Hinton had threatened to refuse to buy from smaller cane-brandy producers. Relations between John Ernest Blandy and Hinton were poor, and Blandy published several critical articles in the *Diário de Notícias da Madeira.*[18]

With many activities in the doldrums because of the war, John Blandy sought other money-making opportunities, with mixed fortunes. Supplying 20,000 pairs of American boots to the French army was a failure as the boots were deemed unacceptable. Investments in concrete-barge construction and in taxicabs in England were also disasters, as was construction in 1925 of a bakery capable of producing enough bread for the whole of Madeira. More successful was a share in a Malaysian rubber company and a joint venture to produce cocoa in West Africa. However, the bakery fiasco saw the Blandys in danger of losing everything: to protect against this, the family partnership was turned into a limited liability company. This was followed by some major restructuring, with many employees being made redundant. With no suitable jobs for British people in Madeira, those who were sacked headed off to all points of the globe, including Australia, the Bahamas and Transvaal. Cuts were also made in the London office and in Las Palmas.

The only way the bakery business could become viable was to increase the price of flour from the Blandy mill to the local bakeries. Inevitably the Portuguese bakers were up in arms about this and they responded by setting up their own, less efficient, mill. The matter was eventually resolved with a merger of the two mills. The advantages of collaboration to achieve economies of scale were also recognised in Las Palmas, where Blandy's and other bunkering companies agreed to share resources, such as office staff, shipping crews and coal depots. Although there was a decline in the bunkering business in Madeira and Las Palmas from 1921, when the US introduced stricter immigration requirements, thus reducing the number of ships heading there, the business soon recovered because of the demands of the Union-Castle Line, which ran a weekly Royal Mail Ship and in 1922 introduced a Round Africa voyage calling at 20 ports, including Madeira. So great was the demand that Blandy's had to start importing coal from the USA and the island became a crucial source of coal for shipping during the British General Strike of 1926.

[17] Correia, p. 213
[18] Shepherd, *op cit*

Blandy's Bank

The Blandy flour mill

Graham Blandy

John Ernest Blandy died in April 1930. He was succeeded by his eldest son, Percy Graham. An amateur historian, Graham enjoyed writing and much of our knowledge of the history of the family owes to his research and to his 1961 publication celebrating the 150th anniversary of the arrival of John Blandy in 1808. Disliking the name "Percy", he was always Graham to family and friends, although he signed himself as "PGB". He was only 25 when he took over as the company's chairman.

In 1923 the company had gone into banking, with some success. Following conservative banking practices, it managed to survive the 1929 stock market crash in the US, unlike several of the other banks in Madeira, which had made more risky investments. In 1931 Blandy's was largely unscathed by riots in Madeira, although there were four deaths in Funchal. The riots had been prompted by a government regulation that established a state monopoly of flour imports, and looting of flour became common. Troops sent from Lisbon to quell the riots also revolted against their leaders, in protest at the efforts being made to track down the leaders of the rioters. In response, the government initiated a blockade of Madeira, leading to a considerable number of visitors being stuck on the island until they could be picked up by a homeward-bound Union-Castle Line vessel. Graham Blandy followed a policy of strict neutrality but, even so, was criticised by both sides for his handling, as their agent, of ships that wanted to enter Funchal port. Fortunately, the rebellion collapsed on May Day 1931.

Shipping line passengers disembarking (1920s-30s)

Graham married Mildred Edmonds in 1934. Daughter of an English father and an Irish mother, she had been born in South Africa and met Graham during a visit to Madeira in 1930. The couple had three children. After the Second World War they would regularly visit South Africa to see her parents. In 1936 the company celebrated its 125th anniversary with a banquet at the *Quinta do Palheiro*. Only men attended! As all employees were invited, it suggests that the company had no female employees at that

time. In 1937 Blandy's took control of Reid's hotel; its bank having lent large sums to the owners to build the hotel's new west wing. Unfortunately, World War Two led to the closure of the hotel in 1940. It was not to reopen until Christmas 1949, just three weeks before Winston Churchill arrived for his famous visit.

Graham had tried to enlist in the war effort but was told by the Foreign Office that he could be more useful in Madeira for the allied cause.[19] Inevitably, WWII, like the first, caused the company many problems but Graham was ably supported by Major Courtenay Shaw, the general manager. The bunkering business was still brisk, although the British and Allied navies were largely oil powered by this time. In 1944 the decision was taken to sell most of the operations in Las Palmas. The exceptions were the Morris Motors, Dodge and Firestone Tyre franchises, which became very profitable in the years after the war, more than compensating for the fact that the company in the Canaries had nothing to sell during hostilities. The offices in London survived the German bombing, but not without a few near misses. In 1946 a Lisbon office was opened which, despite a few initial hiccups, was ultimately to prove successful.

In 1958, Jean Burca was appointed to manage Reid's. He was to stay until 1969, which was perhaps surprising given his first reactions. Taken to his house, across the road from the hotel, he found that the walls were damp and the villa lacked heating. Inspecting the hotel, he discovered that the lounge furnishings were in "tired cretonne", and most of the rooms were "ugly" and lacked style. Most rooms did not have *en-suite* bathrooms and the few shared bathrooms reminded him of those in a "sanatorium". The lifts were antiquated. Even worse, the food was "atrocious".[20] Gradually Burca, who reported to John Reeder, Graham's younger brother, was able to make improvements, helping to raise the reputation of Reid's.

Graham, right, and John Reeder, top centre, with their families in 1969

Britain had been represented by a career consul until the 1960s. When this was considered no longer necessary or, perhaps, affordable, Graham became the honorary consul, despite being in relatively poor health. He had a heart bypass operation in London but died a few years later in April 1972, in Madeira. He did not die a rich man; the war and the costs of running the *Quinta do Palheiro* had been a drain on his capital.

[19] Binney, p. 80
[20] Binney, pp. 92-94

John Reeder Blandy

John Blandy was born in 1909, the third child of John Ernest and Elinor. He went to a preparatory school in England and then to Rugby School, before going to Oxford University. Very much the sportsman, he was in the university's shooting team and then represented Great Britain. He married Cynthia Lees in London in 1932. When World War Two broke out he quickly signed up and was expecting a posting where his shooting skills could be taken advantage of. Instead, as a Portuguese speaker, he was posted to the Azores, in neutral Portugal. Applying for a transfer he was sent to Singapore as an intelligence officer, but found himself transferred to Calcutta before Singapore fell to the Japanese. By VE Day he was in London.

John's first marriage ended in 1939. He married Sylvie Monier-Vinard, only daughter of Raymond Monier-Vinard and his wife Elia, in Paris in 1946 and they lived in London, working in Blandy's London office until 1950, when they moved to Madeira. His main managerial responsibilities became Reid's and the Madeira Wine Company, but he also assisted Graham in other areas, such as the sale of Blandy's Bank to the Espírito Santo family. New company offices were opened in 1960, marking its 150th anniversary. Initially living at the *Quinta das Malvas,* in 1952 John and Sylvie built a new house on *Santo da Serra*, which became known as the *Quinta Madre d'Agua* or the *Santo* house. It was designed by Peter Bicknell, an architect friend of John.[21]

On 22 December 1963, John and Sylvie's three sons, Richard, Michael and Edward, had been on board the TSMS *Lakonia,* sailing from Southampton to Madeira, when it caught fire. Michael credits his brothers for saving his life because he and a friend were fast asleep in their cabin when the fire broke out. They were able to make it to a lifeboat and were eventually rescued, but others were not so lucky, with 128 people losing their lives.[22,23]

Life's report of the fire on the *Lakonia*

After the death of Sylvie's mother, John and Sylvie moved again in 1958 to Sylvie's Madeira family home, the *Quinta da Achada*. Sylvie died in 1979 and Edward, their son, in 1989, both from cancer. Edward had worked with the *Diário de Notícias*, where he had overseen the introduction of offset printing to replace typesetting and had worked closely with the Travel and Shipping departments.

[21] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Bicknell
[22] Binney, pages 121-23
[23] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TSMS_Lakonia

Upgrading Reid's hotel took up a lot of John's time. It was decided that all rooms in the hotel should have sea views and their own bathrooms. This meant moving the corridor to the back of the building. At the same time, air conditioning was installed. This was followed by the construction of the Garden Wing and, for the first time, a swimming pool. Before this, patrons had taken a lift down the cliff to swim in the sea.

Adam Blandy

Adam, who was born in 1935, was the son of Graham and Mildred. He trained as an accountant. When he joined the company, its main businesses were still shipping and insurance, but the opening of the airport on the main island in 1964[24] led to the growth of package tourism and Blandy's was soon representing the Swedish package tour company, Vingresor, as well as the Thomas Cook Group. He met his wife, Christina Bengtsson, when she was acting as a guide in Madeira for Swedish visitors, and they married in 1970. In the late 1960s, Adam started to develop an electronics assembly business, in collaboration with the British company, Muirhead & Co. By 1974 this was employing 600 people. The assembly work involved winding very fine wire and it is said that the women of Madeira were ideal for this work because of their embroidery skills.

Another family portrait. Adam Blandy is in the middle at the back

During the 1970s Adam replaced his uncle, John, as Chairman of the Board. The period after the Carnation Revolution in 1974 was turbulent in Portugal, and Madeira did not escape the problems faced on the mainland. Unions were formed in the electronics factory and there were demands for higher salaries. Such events caused Portex, one of the companies supplied by the factory, to get cold feet and cancel contracts, leading to 200 redundancies. Blandy's later won a legal action in London against Portex for breach of contract. Adam was briefly held hostage by the workers. Worse was to follow: the factory caught fire, apparently through negligence rather than sabotage. Fortunately, the Muirhead company quickly supplied new equipment and operations restarted in a new building. Another challenge faced after the Revolution was the editor of the *Diário de Notícias*, Alberto de Araújo, a supporter of the overthrown Salazar regime. He was prevailed upon to resign, to be replaced by a more progressive journalist from Lisbon who, in turn, also resigned, probably after receiving right-wing threats. During this very difficult time for the businesses, Adam was supported by John Lewis, a chartered accountant and his cousin Richard who was to succeed him after his retirement. Richard and Adam split the responsibilities in the group and, whilst Adam took the lead on the company's property, travel, shipping,

[24] An airport had been opened on Porto Santo island in 1960.

and electronics businesses, as well as the London office and the Canary Islands business; Richard took responsibility for Reid's, Madeira Engineering, the Madeira Wine Association, and the Lisbon Office.

Circuit board assembly

Following the death of his mother in 1984, Adam Blandy decided to relinquish his role as chairman. He and his wife moved to the *Quinta do Palheiro* to try to protect it from expropriation. At one time it had been mooted as a possible site from which missiles could be launched! It was also under threat from the rapid development of tourism in Madeira. Another *quinta*, the *Quinta da Palmeira* in Funchal belonging to the Welsh family, heirs of the Hinton business, was only saved from destruction by the eventual agreement of the authorities to build a road tunnel underneath the house. Attempts by Adam to use the *quinta´s* farm for vegetable production were unsuccessful and so it was decided to turn the farm into a golf course, which opened in October 1993. Further developments included the conversion of the old hunting lodge into the *Casa Velha* hotel, and the development of land around the golf course in the style of a Spanish hill village. The extensive gardens surrounding the main house of the quinta continue to be open to the public.

The Palheiro Gardens

Richard Blandy

Richard, who had been born in 1947, was the son of John Reeder and Sylvie Blandy. He took over as Chairman in 1986 and found himself running a business far different from the business he had joined in 1973. Tourism was starting to boom and new hotels were being developed on Madeira. These offered the economies of scale that Reid's could not possibly achieve. At the same time, the world wine trade was becoming dominated by international corporations, making it more difficult for Madeira wine to compete. Richard developed his own team; he appointed Bill Risso-Gill, a highly energetic executive, while John Ritson, who had replaced John Lewis, moved to London and, in his place, David Vallat was appointed as Group Finance Director.

Richard's brother Edward died in 1989 leaving a hole in the management structure and Bill was keen to move to live in mainland Portugal where the group had made new investments. Richard therefore invited his younger brother Michael to join the Madeira team, which happened in May 1990.

Despite very significant investment in essential works at Reid's in 1990, the team at the hotel was struggling to get the occupancy up to acceptable levels, partially due to the Gulf Wars which badly affected occupancy. It also became apparent that, despite all the previous work, Reid's still needed considerable further investment and Richard realised that Blandy's 'could no longer afford to own "trophy" assets'. In 1996, following enquiries by others interested in acquiring the hotel, it was decided to sell Reid's to Orient Express Hotels, which later changed their name to Belmond. Since 2019, the Belmond Reid's Palace has been owned by *Louis Vuitton Moet Hennessy.*

The Madeira Wine Company, S.A. (MWC) was another such "trophy asset". Originally started as the Madeira Wine Association, founded in 1913 by some of the Madeira wine producing companies, it was joined by Blandy's in 1925, to be followed by other large-scale exporters. By the late 1970s the members of the Madeira Wine Company, as it had become, were just a few of the original families, with the Blandy family holding an 85% share. Richard recognised that the detailed attention needed to improve and promote Madeira wine required a partner that could give it better access to markets. As a result, and after Blandy's had gained 100% control of MWC, a joint venture with the noted Symington port wine family, was agreed. The Symingtons, apart from bringing worldwide distribution and an enormous sales effort, also improved and transformed the winemaking processes.

Under Richard, Bill Risso-Gill set about offloading some properties and developing others. With the Balfour Beatty company it established Reid's Gardens, a block of 44 apartments and townhouses close to the hotel. This venture was in part designed to control the environment around Reid's. Unfortunately, while the units were being sold, the first Gulf War led to sales drying up. But things improved with time and Richard and his team were encouraged enough to build a 72-apartment complex aimed at the Madeira housing market. This project was led by Michael as were the subsequent projects. Further developments were to follow, including on the site of the old *Diário de Notícias* building. Two mixed developments were built, apartments, offices and two shopping malls both with much-needed underground parking.

Bill Risso-Gill put together the project for what was to become, The Cliff Bay Hotel, with 200 rooms of which 188 have a sea view. This was designed to achieve the economies of scale not available in Reid's. It was built by a joint venture, involving Blandy's, the Ocean Island Group, Eden Mar and Quinta do Sol hotel. The Cliff Bay opened in 1993, with much of the building and finishing being overseen by Michael and by Antonio Trindade, controller of the Ocean Island Group.

After Reid's had been sold, Richard and his team set about planning the future of Blandy's. The success of the Joint Venture of the Cliff Bay had been proven with Antonio Trindade leading the sales operations. An agreement had been reached by Michael to develop the old Madeira Engineering yard in the old part of town as a joint venture between Ocean and Blandy's. In 1998 Richard proposed to Trindade that they join forces to form a new Madeira hotel grouping to be born out of Blandy's and Eden Mar/Ocean Islands Company. Michael was tasked with developing the joint venture and during this period, the idea emerged of inviting the German tour operator NUR (Neckermann), later to be part of Thomas Cook, to be a minority partner. The joint venture agreement was signed on 24 August, 2000 with Blandy's and Ocean Islands SGPS SA each having 33.68% and NUR 25.1%, with the remaining 7.5% held by local entrepreneurs. Later that year, in November, the Hotel Porto Santa Maria opened on the site of the old Madeira Engineering yard.

Richard died in London from cancer in August 2002. He had modernized and seen the Group through a tough period and had sown the seeds of what was to become a very successful hotel investment in Porto Bay Hotels & Resort, while still finding time to be honorary British consul. His role of Chairman

of the Board was taken over by his brother, Michael following a call from Richard who having informed him of his dire cancer diagnosis, finished the conversation by saying; "I'm going to fight this cancer but I will not be returning to work, so please take over. Rosemarie has posted my office keys to you – good luck."

Richard Blandy

Michael Blandy

Michael Blandy

Michael, born in 1952, was the third son of John and Sylvie Blandy. He did not go to university but found a job in Newcastle with Mathwin (Newcastle) Shipping Co Ltd, which he enjoyed, and was encouraged to take his shipbroking exams. His father, however, felt that he needed a broader training base and persuaded him to study accountancy, which he did in Edinburgh. He joined the family business in 1977, working as chief accountant in Tenerife.

In 1973-74 Blandy's in Tenerife had obtained the Toyota franchise. Despite the problems caused by the rapid fluctuations of the Yen, this was highly successful. Toyotas became very popular, with the 4x4s proving superior to Land Rovers and their pick-up trucks competing favourably with the Peugeots that had previously dominated the market. Things were going less well in Las Palmas, where Blandy's were stuck with the British Leyland franchise. Despite its pioneering design of the *Mini* in 1960, the company was going downhill fast, with unappealing models and bad build quality. In 1982, Michael and his cousin, Cristobal Bravo, were able to obtain the Opel franchise for Las Palmas, while continuing to sell Land Rovers, Rovers, and Jaguars.[25]

Michael, having started in Tenerife, was persuaded to move to Las Palmas and by 1988 Blandy's were selling 6,000 vehicles a year in the Canaries. At this time Michael recommended selling the business because he felt that the very profitable and good years were unlikely to continue. Unfortunately, he was unable to persuade the board to accept his recommendation. According to Binney, this was just another example of the company's reluctance over the generations to sell a golden goose that was getting close to being a spent bird. There were difficulties in the early 1990s caused by fluctuations in the Sterling – Peseta exchange rate, and then Toyota terminated the distributorship for Tenerife. The high value of the Yen at that time had made it difficult to sell Japanese cars. The dealerships in Tenerife and Las Palmas were eventually sold by Michael and the subsequent sale of a 25% interest in a sister company, which

[25] Binney, p. 131

managed Blandy Shipping, Las Palmas and Viajes Blandy, effectively ended Blandy's involvement in the Canaries.

Michael met his wife, Valerie Sigsworth, in the Canaries and they had two children there before they moved to Madeira in 1990. There he took on a long list of responsibilities, including the Canaries, Reid's, Reid's Gardens, the *Diário de Notícias*, the travel and shipping departments, the remainder of the electronics business, the construction of the Cliff Bay Hotel and the wine business and the development of the remaining properties. In 1992 MWC for the first time started to produce table wines, under the *Atlantis* brand.[26]

Michael carried a heavy load, but particularly enjoyed the building up of the Porto Bay investment. Thomas Cook got into financial difficulties but Blandy's and Ocean were able to buy its 25.1% shareholding, allowing the two original joint-venture partners to take their shareholding up to 45%. Today, Porto Bay has 15 hotels, all of which are partly or fully owned. This equates to 1800 rooms in Portugal (Madeira, Algarve, Lisbon and Porto) plus 225 rooms in Brazil (Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Buzios). The Il Gallo d'Oro restaurant at Cliff Bay has 2 Michelin stars and several of the group's restaurants have Michelin Mentions.

Michael, too, built his team, and when David Vallat became ill with cancer, Michael appointed Philip Wiles to be Group CFO. Philip gave Michael enormous support in many of the aspects of developing the business and Michael puts down his own successes and many of the achievements of the past, to the non-family executives who were employed from time to time and are mentioned in this short history of the business.

Problems were also experienced with the *Diário de Notícias,* which had not been showing a profit after the 1974 Revolution and was constantly being criticised by local politicians. It also had to compete with the heavily subsidised *Jornal da Madeira*, owned by the islands' government. In the 1990s Blandy's, still under Richard's leadership, sold a 40 percent stake in the paper, with the aim of bringing in a partner with knowledge of the publishing business. But owning 60% still meant having control and Michael had challenges managing his relationship with the outspoken president of the then Regional Government, Dr. Alberto João Jardin. As Michael correctly forecast when the Blandy's book celebrating 200 years was published in 2011, the problem would probably only go away when Dr. Jardin relinquished his position. Michael was lucky to have both as a friend and an excellent manager of this business, Dr José Camara, who seemed to know everyone on the island. The *Diário de Notícias* was viewed as a useful tool to defend the group from the criticisms of the *Jornal da Madeira* and this clearly worked. However, with the changes in the media industry, the arrival of social media, and a desire to move on, Blandy's sold control in the newspaper to two Madeira businessmen, retaining just a 12% share.

Symington Family Estates took up their option to become majority shareholders of MWC in 1993 and the business developed slowly and perhaps more slowly than they had hoped. Generations change in family companies, and with this it is more than natural that objectives also change and, in 2008, the Symington family approached Michael Blandy with a view to selling their shareholding. Finally, in August 2011 the two families signed an agreement that again gave the Blandy family control of MWC. Symington continues to be a shareholder, and continues to distribute Blandy's Madeira and other MWC brands through its associated companies.[27,28] Michael tasked his cousin Chris Blandy, of the seventh generation of the family, who had joined the group in 2007, to lead and manage the MWC. This he has done and has developed the iconic Blandy's Wine Lodge, which stores around 800,000 litres of wine, and which continues to be a popular tourist attraction, with a marvellous museum all about Blandy's.

[26] https://www.madeirawinecompany.com/en/wine/atlantis-wine.html
[27] https://www.blandy.com/en/group-history.html
[28] https://www.madeirawinecompany.com/en/about-us/our-history.html

The seventh generation

Above, we have listed six generations of the Blandy family who have played a major role in the company's business since John Blandy arrived in Madeira in 1808. Several of the next generation are actively involved in the company's activities, and things seem well set for the next 200 years. Richard Blandy's son, Andrew, has replanted the upper terraces of *Quinta Santa Luiza* with vines and organises tours of the *quinta*.[29] Adam's second son, Christopher, became managing director of the travel and shipping agencies and of the Madeira Wine Company and in 2018 became CEO of the Blandy Group. And Michael's son, John, is a director of Porto Bay Hotels having studied and worked in the industry since leaving school, A real family enterprise!

Outside the group, Adam Blandy's elder son, Jonathan, runs Palheiro Golf, and Palheiro Estate is now chaired by Adam's son in law, Phillippe, who is married to Louisa, Adam's eldest daughter. Georgie Blandy, widow of Edward, converted the family home into a very successful hotel with the aid of partners who took a majority interest in the enterprise.

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Andrew Shepherd *is the editor of the British Historical Society's quarterly newsletter. He is also the author of several articles published by the Society.*

As noted at the beginning, this article is based on the book entitled *The Blandys of Madeira, 1811-2011*. The author of that publication was Marcus Binney.

Marcus Binney*, CBE, is a champion of endangered historic buildings, not only in Britain but increasingly in other European countries. He is president of SAVE Britain's Heritage and has been chairman of SAVE Europe's Heritage. Binney has also written two books about the men and women agents of the Special Operations Executive (SOE). An architectural writer for* ***Country Life****, he entered the fray against the mindless destruction of our built environment, charting the changing fortunes of great country houses and the families that owned them. His interest in Portugal began with a series of articles that led to* ***Country Manors of Portugal****. Binney has also written books on the London Ritz and the Palace Hotel in St. Moritz. He has also served as the architectural correspondent of* ***The Times****.*[30]

[29] Incidentally, Richard's daughter, Katrina, who is a member of Blandy's board, is married to Richard Mayson, the author of *Madeira: The Islands and Their Wines*, among other books on wine and other topics. Richard spoke to the Society in 2024 on *The Music of the Revolution.*

[30] See also https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marcus_Binney