

The British Cemetery in Salvador da Bahia

The British Cemetery in Salvador da Bahia is one of three British or, more precisely, non-Catholic cemeteries remaining in Brazil, the others being in Rio de Janeiro and Recife. The author, who previously contributed an article on the Rio de Janeiro cemetery to the Society's 2005 Annual Report,¹ now reviews the history of the Salvador cemetery as well as some of the more interesting graves.

By Carol Rankin

Background

At the start of the Peninsular War, with Junot and his French forces just two days march from Lisbon, the Portuguese Royal family and its entourage left the country. They sailed in Portuguese ships of the line escorted by the British navy, arriving in Salvador on 22 January 1808 and in Rio's Guanabara Bay some weeks later on 7 March. At this time, if Britain or any other nation wanted to trade with Brazil it had to do so through Portugal. This all changed with the signing of the Royal Decree shortly after arrival in Salvador, opening Brazilian ports to ships of friendly nations. The Convention, signed in London the previous October, foresaw this action, in exchange for providing an escort all the way to Brazil. Further, in the 1810 Treaty of Commerce negotiated by Lord Strangford, Britain was granted a number of exclusive trading rights with Brazil. British subjects were not slow to realise that there were business and trading opportunities to be had and they arrived in Salvador in increasing numbers; it was an important port and had been Brazil's capital city until 1763.



The cemetery entrance²

¹ <https://www.bhsportugal.org/library/articles/the-british-cemetery-in-rio-de-janeiro>

² Photo: Author

The British not only needed a place to worship but somewhere to bury their dead, who hitherto had had to be buried in unconsecrated ground. They were helped by the fact that Article 12 of the Treaty of Commerce stated, “British citizens in Brazilian territories shall not be perturbed in the practice of their Protestant faith”. In response to a petition signed by the British Consul and some leaders of the British community, on 8 February 1811, the Governor of the Province of Bahia, the Conde dos Arcos, approved the establishment of the British Cemetery in Salvador. The chosen site was off the Ladeira da Barra, where rights had been acquired for a piece of cleared land formerly leased by the chapel of Santo António da Barra. This was a bit of a distance from the city centre but in a wonderful position overlooking the Bahia de Todos os Santos. Originally the cemetery land went right down to the water’s edge. It is historically important as it predates the opening of Salvador’s first public open-air cemetery by two decades.



The Bahia de Todos os Santos seen from the cemetery³

Burials

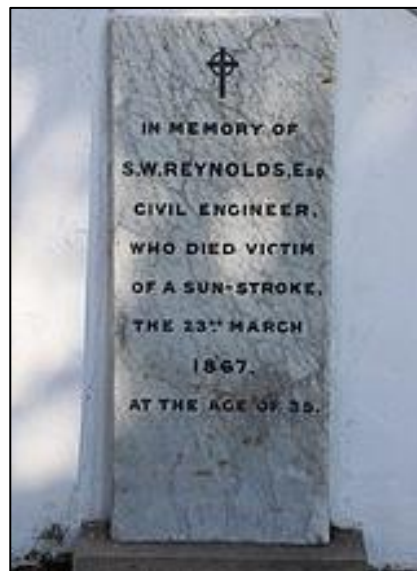
Early cemetery records have disappeared but it is likely that burials took place there before 1813, which is the date of the oldest headstone in existence today. Its inscription reads: “John Sharp – born Liverpool 1777. Merchant of this place. Died September 1813, aged 36”. In the 20th century many headstones were vandalised or lost, but those still there provide a real history lesson and even state the cause of death, the majority of people in the 19th century dying relatively young. Yellow fever was the biggest killer, but many also died from typhus, tetanus and malaria. Carelessly perhaps, in 1867 S. W. Reynolds aged 35 fell victim to sun-stroke. In June 1825 the first child was buried, the new-born daughter of Joseph and Elizabeth Miller, and after that other gravestones record infant deaths, showing that whole families were then coming to live in Salvador and a real British community was becoming established. The first recorded woman to be buried in the cemetery was Maria Constança d’Araújo Freitas Ogilvie. She died in 1837 and was the wife of Thomas Ogilvie, although intermarriage between British and Portuguese or Brazilians was not common in the first half of the 19th century.

³ Photo: Author

An inscribed tablet marks the grave of The Reverend Cecil F. Luckman MA, who had been British Consular Chaplain for nearly four years when he died in 1896 aged 36 (until c1823 there was no Anglican chaplain in Bahia). Most British lived in the Corredor da Victoria (Vitória today), a road starting in Campo Grande and eventually reaching the beach of Porto da Barra, thus passing the British Cemetery. Circa 1853, the Anglican chapel came to be housed in a handsome classical building on the Campo Grande itself. The building followed the Brazilian Emperor's edict and resembled a normal house. Sadly, it was demolished in 1975 but was described as "the beautiful old St. George's Church ... one of the city's most valuable monuments". Today's little chapel in the British Cemetery bears the same name.



Grave of The Reverend Cecil F. Luckman⁴



Grave of S.W. Reynolds⁵

A memorial stone exists for Alexander Paterson M.D. He was born in Aberdeen and died there but in between was in charge of the British Hospital in Bahia for thirteen years (1837-1850). A British Hospital was opened in 1815 and housed under the same roof as the original Protestant chapel for several decades. By 1853 a yellow fever epidemic had forced the hospital to relocate to the peninsula of Bomfim. Another notable doctor buried at the cemetery is John Ligertwood Paterson, who died in 1882 and was one of the founders of the Brazilian School of Tropical Medicine (these two doctors were probably brothers).

A wander round the graves gives one a real insight into the 19th century occupations of the deceased. In the early years of the British presence most men arrived as bachelors; merchants seeking to make their fortunes and establish themselves professionally. One such was Edward Pellew Wilson, who arrived in 1819 and resided in the city for 68 years until he died in 1887. He was the founder of Wilson Sons, shipping agents and operators of port terminals and tugboats.

There are many graves whose occupants were allied to the shipping business. Hugh Morris, who died in 1838 aged 33, was master of a Brig. A lad who died aged 16 was the son of a shipmaster. In 1832, *The Beagle* called in at Salvador. On board was the famous naturalist Charles Darwin

⁴ Photo: Author

⁵ This and subsequent photos are by Paul R. Burley. See

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Cemit%C3%A9rio_dos_Inglesees_\(Salvador\)](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Cemit%C3%A9rio_dos_Inglesees_(Salvador))

whose diary records that three of the crew had died. Two of them were buried in the British Cemetery but the whereabouts of their graves is unknown.



Detail from the tomb of Edward Pellew Wilson



John Ligertwood Paterson grave

In the second half of the 19th century new arrivals tended to be tradesmen rather than merchants, such as machinists, clockmakers, and engineers. A plaque on the left-hand wall of the cemetery's upper level is a memorial to the many "English Gentlemen" who died of yellow fever during the construction of the Bahia and São Francisco railway after 1850. Frederick Hope was "Chefe" of the Gas Company, obviously a well-liked individual as a nice monument was erected in his memory by his fellow workers after his death in 1897.

The Registers of the British Chapel show that between 1836 and 1863, 62 children were born to British subjects, 60% girls, 40% boys. With no British school in Salvador, it was common practice to send children back to England for their main education, and not many returned to live or work in the city. During that same period, 42 known members of the British community died and were buried in the British cemetery, with the occasional female death occurring in prime childbearing years: clearly Elizabeth Buckingham was not one of these, she died aged 56 years old having given birth to 15 children!

Burial in the cemetery was not solely restricted to British nationals and adherents to the Anglican faith. A walk round the upper level reveals Dutch, Belgian, North American, German, Swiss, Italian and French names on headstones, and there are undoubtedly other nationalities. The lower terrace of the cemetery is largely taken up by a Jewish section. Again, headstones show different nationalities and many have Hebrew inscriptions.



Two of the Jewish gravestones

Protecting the site

A major change to the site occurred in 1938 when the city government expropriated the lowest level of the cemetery by the water's edge. This was to enable the construction of a road connecting the Port of Barra to the Yacht Club.

Over successive generations, the Brazilianisation of some of the British community was inevitable. This might partly account for the fact that during the 20th century the Anglican chapel at Campo Grande was demolished and the British Cemetery gradually fell into a “deplorable condition”. In 1988, a new body was elected to administer the Society of the Church of St. George and the British Cemetery (this is a non-profit organisation that owns the cemetery on behalf of the British community). At this time the cemetery was covered in thick, almost impenetrable, vegetation and had suffered extensive vandalism. With no money available to improve things, volunteers from British warships visiting the port cleaned up part of the site, enough to allow access to the graves; it was all they could do in the short time available to them.

Being in such a wonderful position, there was a perceived threat that real estate developers might move in, so a petition was presented to the State Government requesting that it be listed as a heritage site. This was granted on September 20th, 1993. In the meantime, the board of the St. George's Society has also requested listing at the federal level.

In 2003, a partnership with the Clemente Mariani Foundation was signed, dedicated to the cemetery's preservation (the Mariani family own property opposite the cemetery), and a request to the State Government for some funding was successful. Thus, in 2004, a comprehensive restoration project could be undertaken, which included work on the retaining walls, chapel, the sewer and lighting systems and the graves themselves. There is still quite a bit of work to be done, particularly on some individual graves but the cemetery is now beautifully kept, as is St. George's

chapel. Graphic panels and leaflets provided by the Administration tell visitors something of the cemetery's history and there is even a full-time guard. Occasional burials continue to take place and the cemetery is open to visitors from 08.00 – 18.00 every day.

Sources

Carol Rankin. *The British Cemetery in Rio de Janeiro*. BHSP Annual Report 32, 2005

Louis Guenther. *The British community of 19th century Bahia*. Working Paper CBS-32-03, University of Oxford Centre for Brazilian Studies

Society of the Church of St. George and the British Cemetery Salvador/Bahia. A brief history and graphic panels provided by The Administration

1993 newspaper article by Thales de Azevedo

Author's notes and observations at the cemetery.

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Carol Rankin (BA Hons) spent many years leading Fine Arts tours to Portugal, and wrote part of two guide books. She has lectured to the BHS on a variety of subjects, most recently at the 2022 Annual Lunch, and has contributed several articles to the Society's Annual Reports. She has for several years been working to sort out the archival material at St George's Church in Lisbon.