

# URUGUAY:

## A TRAVEL AND LITERARY COMPANION



ANDREW GRAHAM-YOOLL

L.O.L.A.



Photo: Adriana Ortea

## ANDREW GRAHAM-YOOLL

(1944) was born in Buenos Aires of a Scottish father and an English mother. He is the author of over twenty books, written in English and Spanish.

Graham-Yooll joined the *Buenos Aires Herald* in 1966. He left the paper in 1976 when he went into exile during the military dictatorship. In Britain, he worked on the Foreign Desk of *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Guardian*, and was editor of *South* magazine (1985-88), and of *Index on Censorship* (1989-93). In 1994 he returned to Argentina where he became editor-in-chief and president of the board of the *Buenos Aires Herald*. He left the paper in December 2007. He currently works for *Perfil*.

Graham-Yooll's books include the now classic *A State of Fear. Memories of Argentina's Nightmare* (1985), which author Graham Greene called "the book of the year" at the time. He is also known for *The Forgotten Colony. A History of the English-speaking Communities in Argentina*, first published in 1981 and reprinted by **L.O.L.A.** in 1999. Other books include *Small Wars You May have Missed* (1983), *Committed Observer. Memoirs of a Journalist* (1989), *Goodbye Buenos Aires* (1999), among a total of more than twenty titles. He has also worked on documentary films, in broadcasting, and is a freelance writer for several publications, in English and Spanish.

In 2002, he was awarded the Order of the British Empire (OBE). He has four children and three grandchildren.

# Uruguay:

| A Travel and  
| Literary Companion

| Compiled by  
| Andrew Graham-Yooll

**L.O.L.A.**

**(Literature of Latin America)**

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## Preface

The beginnings of this book go back to 1986. That is the year of a letter from Mr Eric V. Vines, then British ambassador in Montevideo, where he offered information and recommendations about the English-speaking community in Uruguay in answer to my query. That would be the first "thank you".

The final thank you goes to the man who has made this book possible, Colin Sharp, and his Buenos Aires imprint, **(Literature of Latin America) L.O.L.A.** Colin Sharp has been an active supporter and keeper of what might be described as the cultural heritage of the English-speaking communities in the River Plate and has taken on a book which other publishers felt was not commercially viable.

In the course of compiling this volume I was privileged to have met many wonderful people, who were forthcoming with assistance and their friendship.

The original idea in 1985, or 1986, was intended to be a record of a community, partly made by personal research and by the memories of people whom I had known through the British Schools, in Montevideo, or met later as a journalist. I wanted to produce a history of the British and North American communities in Uruguay (readers will see some of this reflected in the book list, which includes texts by authors from several English-speaking countries). Alas, absence from Montevideo and long residence in other parts of the world made research visits impossible. So the "book" gradually changed in nature, at times was abandoned, and resumed with different information and aims. Now it is intended for a broader readership: a travel and literary companion for the visitor as well as the general reader.

However, the growth of expatriate English-speaking communities, whether in Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Madras or Accra (places where I became interested in, nay, fascinated by, the "old British and North American" presence) prompts the certainty that in all cases the modern development of many twentieth century societies lies in the nineteenth century work of these communities of merchants, educators, adventurers and such. Events such as the foundation of a hospital, or the building of churches, and the records therein, for example, of the attendance of services at a church, any church, perhaps the Emmanuel Methodist Episcopal Church, established in 1930 on Avenida 18 de Julio, in central Montevideo, can lead to histories of families and national occasions. The discovery of a street name can become a source of



achapter when, for example, it is called Lafone, in the Cerro area of Montevideo. It is named after Samuel Lafone, businessman, property owner, and active community supporter who died of yellow fever on April 30, 1871, in Buenos Aires. That leads to knowledge that he contributed to the start of the first Holy Trinity Church, in 1828, and the adjoining Hall is named after him. Each little item seems an intriguing piece in the puzzle of local history. Lafone, who owned land that is today Punta del Este, and much of Lafonia in the Malvinas/Falklands among many other properties, outlived his wife, María Quevedo, who died in August 1866. Their marriage in Buenos Aires, during the government of Dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas precipitated a scandal, political and religious, because he was an Anglican and she a Catholic. The scandal is interesting because a change in some social attitudes was noted in the aftermath. Samuel Lafone, by the way, founded a forerunning cricket and rowing club, between 1842 and 1846

The British community in Uruguay had its first cemetery in 1828 (moved to Malvín, in 1884). The Monte Video Cricket Club (MVCC) was started in 1861, rugby was thought to have been played there as from 1875, in the beginning only by ships' crews (even though the sport began as an elite game in England). Peñarol was once an English club, which became champion in Montevideo in 1900 and 1901. The Montevideo Garden and Poultry Club was founded on August 5, 1936, with 16 members, and the first exhibition was held four months later at the Victoria Hall (later Teatro Victoria). Members met once a month and then took tea.

The characters and personalities were pioneers. One Thomas Walker, at Conchillas, north of Colonia, employed three thousand people in the supply of stone to build Puerto Madero, in Buenos Aires. A man named Evans started the first hotel in the Conchillas area. Herbert Percival Coates started the Rotary Club in Uruguay. A gentleman named Thomas Tomkinson started a "saladero" to export dry meat, and introduced the eucalyptus to Uruguay. The names and enterprises parade before the eye. The English-language papers in Montevideo provide a gallery of names and histories. The very first paper of its kind in South America was started during the British occupation by General Auchmuty in 1807, *The Southern Star*, and was short lived, but it is a landmark in regional history. Its name was used again in September 1943 (the English Club held copies dated up to October 1946), for a weekly edited by H. Haywood on the initiative and finance of Henry Hugh Grindley and friends, to compete against the rival, *The Sun*, owned by George Mayer, and printed between the 1920s and 1950s. The long line of newspaper titles appears to have ended with *The Montevidean*, started in October 1951 by Junius Julius Rugeroni, owner of the *Buenos Aires Herald*, published up to 1971, when it was edited by Ilma Lewis, and who ran it up to her retirement and return to Britain that year.

For much of the above information about newspapers I am indebted to Oliver Marshall, whose *The English-Language Press in Latin America* (1996) is a vital source.

And this inevitably leads to a substantial list of thanks. Given the length of time taken since the start of work on this book, the people to be thanked run into several hundreds, many of whom will be accidentally omitted here. One who was attributed with the most details about the British in Uruguay was the late Sir Robert Jackson Bt., always generous with information in his correspondence, right up to his death in 2000, three days short of his 90th birthday. I am also indebted to his daughter, Bertha Jackson, who inherited the difficult task of looking through her father's records. I have kept letters from Mr. H. Winston Willans, in 1986 president of the British-Uruguayan Chamber of Commerce, and head of the Coopers office, for his assistance, which included finding an article on horticulture and plant health written by my father, and which I had never seen. Equally important was the already mentioned British ambassador, Eric V. Vines, and even more so his assistant, Val (Valentina) Isaacs. Mr S.W. Johnson's valuable recollections of Fray Bentos, an entertaining description of rural and small town life styles, came to me through the British Uruguayan Society, in England, and in particular through Miss Jill Quaife. The mine of information about Uruguay and about Sir Eugen Millington-Drake in the possession of Miss Quaife was awe inspiring, some of it reproduced in the Society's magazine, *El Hornero*, and in other accounts. And my special thanks to Stephen Harwood, for his kindness in showing me the correspondence of his father, Admiral Henry Harwood (1888-1950), commander of H.M.S. *Exeter*, to his wife, Joan, as from 17 December 1939, on landing at Montevideo after seeing the *Admiral Graf Spee* scuttled, a few days following the Battle of the River Plate.

Dr Henry Finch, of the University of Liverpool, whose economic history of Uruguay is an important source of reference, was generous with information, as was Jason Wilson, at the Department of Spanish and Latin American Studies, University College London. A special thanks to Dr. John Walker, in Canada, for his volume on the South American sketches of Robert Bontine Cunninghame Graham, and to the author's niece and custodian of the literary estate, Lady Polwarth. In Montevideo, the resources of the Biblioteca Nacional, on Avenida 18 de Julio, offered a wonderful stock of bibliography. Karen Harvey, at *The Guardian* newspaper library and archives, was kind enough to find several articles sought for this collection.

In Montevideo, I am indebted to prominent and much respected historians such as José Pedro Barrán (at the Universidad de la República), Juan Oddone, Ana Inés Larre Borges, Benjamín Nahum, and Juan Miguel Bresciano (the latter at the ORT

University). At the Universidad ORT Uruguay I was generously welcomed and assisted by the Dean, Jorge Grunberg, and senior lecturers Eduardo Hipogrosso and Virginia Silva. For advice and help I am indebted to Ana Larravide, Julio César Gaeta, George Roper (at the British Cemetery), Bernard Jones, Andrés Alsina Bea and his wife Amanda Pérez (who found me the copy of the 1807 account of Montevideo attributed to Auchmuty, and I am grateful for their friendship), Gustavo Meikle (at Mercopress), historian Gerardo Caetano, and Richard Cowley (in the nineties, at the Cultura Inglesa, AUCI, on San José, Cowley allowed me to wade through the dusty collections of the *Montevideo Times*), Marta Ponce de León (in charge of public relations at the Intendencia), in Congress, senator Rafael Michelini, and bookseller and publisher, Adolfo Linardi (of Librería El Jagüel, in Buenos Aires, and a descendant of Samuel Lafone). At the English Club in Montevideo (first president, John Krabbé, in 1868), when it was at Treinta y Tres and Reconquista, Oliver Ward (club President, in 2001), Dion Bridal, and John Mountford (chairman of the British Cemetery) welcomed me to the club bar and to the papers held in the turret; Patrick Sherwood, of the British Hospital committee, David Oie (chairman of the Royal British Legion branch), R. Vignoles (for notes on his father, Edwin Herbert Vignoles and the *Graf Spee*), British Ambassador Andrew Murray and Vice Consul Gerry Evans (in January 2001, instrumental in the meeting held by the veterans of the H.M.S *Exeter* and the *Admiral Graf Spee*, a ceremony that was a rare privilege for a journalist), to Nelson Bascou Joubert (for notes on the history of the port of Montevideo), Daniela Bouret (at the Teatro Solís), Adriana Zanutigh, Argentine consul at Paysandú, Beatriz Vegh, of the department of modern literature at the School of Humanities, at the Universidad de la República (for her great interest in W.H. Hudson).

The well-known Uruguayan writers Mario Benedetti, Eduardo Galeano and María Esther Gilio, as well as the late and much loved film critic and writer Homero Alsina Thevenet, helped me with their conversations, history and sources through the years, in Barcelona, Madrid and Montevideo. And to these names must be added that of Rosario-born, Elvio Gandolfo. I am also grateful to the English writer Martin Amis, and his wife, Isabel Fonseca, while they were living at José Ignacio, on the Atlantic coast.

In a strange way, it was Montevideo that opened my eyes to the world, in 1958, when part of the family moved to the Uruguayan capital from village life outside Buenos Aires. The mix of nationalities at the British Schools, in Carrasco, introduced me to different ways of seeing peoples and customs. I cannot remember ever passing an examination, but the school offered a revealing universality. Arthur J. Hobson gave me the run of the school library in exchange for keeping the place tidy; and Mr Ogston, with his dry

wit, helped see the world beyond the village. Hence, my gratitude to these men and to the School. In so saying, there is also a special “saludo” to my contemporaries with whom I have remained in contact over the years, and through Robin Cooper, chairman of the board of governors, a salute to the school in its centenary year.

The Hotel *Lancaster*, on Plaza Cagancha, was my most regular residence in Montevideo, and the *Fonda El Lobizón*, on San José street, provided the tables on which I frequently scribbled my notes.

Finally, this book was produced with the help of Rosa Amuchástegui (1928-2006), long serving assistant and friend at the *Buenos Aires Herald*, who typed and retyped the sections as they changed, as did my sister, Joanne Graham-Yooll, who helped to bring order to the stacks of paper. Finally the patience (patience being an important ingredient), love and encouragement of Adriana were vital contributions to complete the work.

*Barracas, Buenos Aires;  
and Pueblo Liebig, Entre Ríos, Summer 2008.*

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**T**he reality of a city is the fantasy that people put into its walls. No city would be bearable without a great dose of imagination. Montevideo is a grey city. But the open water on which the length of the capital spreads helps to give it a burst of light that shines brightly just around the darkest corners. The water, and a history that might even seem strange – that “personal” detail that makes cities almost human - and runs to the present day, when Montevideo is an “off-shore” banking and financial centre, transform the small capital into the most international city in South America. The salty fringes of the river Plate, near where it becomes open sea, makes Uruguay’s capital feel much closer to the rest of the world, more than does the neighbouring and allegedly more cosmopolitan Buenos Aires. The reason lies in the fantasy. Uruguay is the most international country in South America. (From the Introduction, by Andrew Graham-Yooll)

This “companion” to Uruguay is a guide to the country’s history and culture for the visitor and for the general reader, and an entertainment for all who have had contact with or are curious about this remarkable nation.

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