1 Britain and Latin America in historical perspective
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There can be no field of enterprise so magnificent in promise, so well calculated to raise sanguine hopes, so congenial to the most generous sympathies, so consistent with the best and highest interests of England as the vast continent of South America.

Henry Brougham, House of Commons, 13 March 1817

For more than a century – from the Napoleonic Wars and, more especially, from the dramatic events of 1807–8 in the Iberian Peninsula which eventually led to the breakup of the American empires of both Spain and Portugal – Britain was the dominant external actor in the economic and, to a lesser extent, the political affairs of Latin America. The foundations of British commercial and financial pre-eminence in Latin America were firmly laid at the time of the formation of the independent Latin American states during the second and third decades of the nineteenth century. Throughout the century which followed, until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, Britain supplied more of the manufactured and capital goods imported into Latin America, more of the loans given to the new Latin American governments and more of the capital invested in Latin American infrastructure (above all, railways), agriculture and mining than any other nation. British merchant houses and, from the 1860s, British banks played a central role in the Latin American economies. British ships carried the bulk of the produce exported from Latin America and Britain was itself a major market for Latin American food and raw materials. The nineteenth century was the ‘British century’ in Latin America.

During the first half of the twentieth century, and especially after 1914, the United States replaced Britain, first as Latin America’s leading trading partner and then as Latin America’s main source of capital. By 1945 the United States had also established its political – and in many cases cultural – hegemony throughout the subcontinent (except in Argentina). Britain nevertheless maintained a considerable financial and commercial presence in South America, and indeed retained a dominant position in Argentina (then the leading Latin American republic), until the Second World War. Even in the years immediately after 1945 Britain remained second (albeit a poor second) to the United States among the outside powers with an interest in the region. It was only in
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the second half of the twentieth century that Britain finally abandoned its role as a significant actor in the economic and political affairs of Latin America.

British interest in Latin America goes back to the late sixteenth century when, like other maritime powers, England first cast envious eyes on the immense and mineral-rich empire that Spain had acquired in the New World and the colonial trade it was attempting to monopolise. Hawkins, Drake and Raleigh became Elizabethan heroes as a result of their attacks on Spanish fleets and on Spanish possessions in Central America and the Caribbean. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, with a few exceptions like the (permanent) capture of Jamaica in 1655 and the (temporary) seizure of Havana in 1761, the English concentrated on developing an extensive contraband trade with Spanish America (and with the Portuguese colony of Brazil). In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and especially during the Napoleonic Wars when European markets were largely closed to British manufactured goods, a powerful lobby of politicians, merchants and manufacturers, naval and military officers brought pressure to bear on successive British governments in favour of conquest in Spanish America. There were plans for conquest as there were indeed for liberation. The only serious attempt, however, to annex any part of the Spanish empire – the British invasion of the Río de la Plata in 1806–7 – was, at least in its inception, entirely unauthorised.

‘By an express which we have just received from Portsmouth’, reported The Times on 13 September 1806, ‘we have to congratulate the Public on one of the most important events of the present war ... Buenos Aires at this moment forms a part of the British Empire.’ On 27 June some 1,600 British troops had captured the second-largest city in Spanish South America and capital of a vast region, the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata, which stretched from the Atlantic to the Andes and from Patagonia in the far south to the borders of modern Peru. The idea of capturing Buenos Aires had originated in the fertile mind of Sir Home Riggs Popham, commander of the English fleet that had taken Cape Town from the Dutch earlier in the year. Nevertheless the British government, with the enthusiastic support of commercial and manufacturing interests, decided to back the invasion. Additional forces were dispatched to the River Plate (and plans were prepared for major expeditions to Venezuela and Mexico). In the meantime, however, the British troops had suffered a bloody and humiliating defeat. After less than seven weeks they had been driven out of Buenos Aires. On 3 February 1807, after reinforcements had begun to arrive, the British captured Montevideo. On 28 June 9,000 troops began a second assault on Buenos Aires. It was a disastrous failure (401 dead, 649 wounded and 1,924 taken prisoner). With the evacuation of Montevideo on 9 September 1807, Britain’s short-lived empire in southern South America came to an inglorious end.

There were in fact only three outposts of the British Empire in Latin America which survived into the twentieth century: British Guiana and the settlement of Belize (British Honduras) on the mainland and the Falkland Islands 300 miles
offshore. Essequibo, Demerara and Berbice on the ‘wild coast’ of northern South America between the Orinoco and the Amazon were first seized from the Dutch in 1796 and formally ceded to Britain by treaty in 1814–15. In 1831 they were united in the Crown colony of British Guiana which became a major producer of sugar. The boundaries were not clearly defined, however, and British claims based on the surveys of the German naturalist Robert Schomburgk in the 1830s and 1840s were disputed by British Guiana’s Latin American neighbour, Venezuela. British logwood cutters had first established themselves at the mouth of the Belize river on the western shore of the Bay of Honduras on the Caribbean coast of Central America in the middle of the seventeenth century. By the end of the eighteenth century Spain had reluctantly come to recognise limited British rights there although Spain never renounced sovereignty. During the first half of the nineteenth century the Belize Settlement expanded to twice the area of the old Spanish concession and became a major producer of mahogany and the principal entrepôt for independent Central America, which lacked deep-water ports. In the meantime Britain had attempted to strengthen its position in Belize’s ‘dependencies’. In 1839 Roatán and neighbouring islands, strategically situated off the northern coast of Honduras and only 120 miles from Belize, were seized and in 1852 became the Crown colony of the Bay Islands. In 1842, after a lapse of half a century, a protectorate was re-established over the Mosquito Shore, an ill-defined area several hundred miles long on the Caribbean coasts of Honduras and Nicaragua. However, the Bay Islands were ceded to Honduras in 1859 and Britain withdrew from the Mosquito Shore in 1860. Only the Belize Settlement remained of Britain’s Central American possessions. In 1862 it became the Crown colony of British Honduras – its territorial limits, like those of British Guiana, to be disputed by a Latin American neighbour (in this case Guatemala).

The Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas), ‘discovered’ by the ships of several nations in the sixteenth century, had been first settled in the 1760s by France (1764–7) and then by Spain (1767–1811), in the case of East Falkland, and by Britain (1765–74), in the case of West Falkland. The newly independent state of the United Provinces of the Río de la Plata (Argentina) occupied the Islands in 1816, began their settlement in 1820, established a political and military command there in 1829, but was expelled by Britain in 1833. In 1841 the Falklands became a Crown colony and ten years later had been settled by 287 British subjects. By the end of the century the Falkland Islands, still claimed by Argentina, were occupied by some 2,000 people and 800,000 sheep.

With few political or military obligations of empire Britain’s interests in Latin America during the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century were primarily, indeed almost exclusively, commercial. Only five months after the Buenos Aires débâcle an early opportunity had arisen to expand British trade – and extend British political influence – throughout much of South America. In November 1807 the British navy escorted the Portuguese court, fleeing Napoleon’s armies, across the Atlantic to Brazil, where the following January the
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Prince Regent opened Brazilian ports to the trade of friendly nations, that is to say, Britain. Not only was Brazil an important market in itself for British manufactured goods, especially textiles and ironware; it was a convenient back door to the Río de la Plata and the Pacific coast of Spanish America. British exports to Brazil in 1808 were valued at over £2 million (8 per cent of total British exports). At the same time, in the wake of Napoleon’s overthrow of the monarchy in Spain, rebellions (which eventually became revolutions for independence) broke out in the Río de la Plata and many other parts of Spanish America and the resulting new regimes, like the Portuguese government in Rio de Janeiro, were eager to open their ports to British trade. In some years before the end of the European war in 1815 Latin America absorbed as much as a third of British exports.

Although officially neutral in the wars for independence, Britain made it clear that it would never allow Spain to reimpose its commercial monopoly in Spanish America and insisted that the region must remain open to British trade. With the Royal Navy in complete command of the Atlantic, Britain was also able to guarantee that no other European power intervened in Spanish America on behalf of Spain. Meanwhile, unofficially, 6,000 British officers and men fought alongside the insurgents, especially in Venezuela and Colombia, Peru and Bolivia. In December 1824, George Canning, the British Foreign Secretary, was able to write in a famous and much-quoted letter to his friend Lord Granville, British ambassador in Paris, ‘Spanish America [including by this time Mexico and Central America] is free and if we do not mismanage our affairs sadly, she is English’, and in a similar vein, a year later, ‘Behold! the New World established and, if we do not throw it away, ours!’  

Commercial treaties were imposed on Mexico, Colombia, Argentina and other independent Spanish American republics (with little possibility of negotiation) as a precondition for much-sought-after recognition by Britain, the world’s leading power. These guaranteed most-favoured-nation treatment for British trade and protection for the lives, liberties and properties of British subjects. Exceptionally, the treaty of 1827 with Brazil, which in 1822 had separated itself from Portugal to become an independent Empire, included preferential duties on imported British manufactured goods (while Britain continued to discriminate against Brazil’s major exports, sugar and coffee, in favour of colonial produce) and extraterritorial rights and privileges (including special courts) for British merchants in Brazil.

By the late 1820s there were sizeable British communities in all the major coastal towns of Latin America, especially Rio de Janeiro, Montevideo, Valparaíso (the principal port of entry and entrepôt for the west coast of South America) and Buenos Aires, where 3,000–4,000 British subjects had their own church, chapel, cemetery and library. In the lower depths of these communities could be found what Henry Stephen Fox, the British minister in Buenos Aires, in 1832 described as ‘persons . . . of the most foul and disreputable character . . . all under the impression that this is a British colony, to be governed by British laws of which I am to be the administrator’. Fox, who in 1835 had moved to the British
legation in Rio, claimed that he had never seen, or read of, or heard described 'so vile a community as the English scrapings now settled in South America.' Yet there were also respectable cabinetmakers, tailors, physicians, apothecaries, upholsterers, blacksmiths, bootmakers, hatters, watchmakers and saddlers. At the head of these British communities were the representatives — some transient, some becoming permanent residents — of more than 200 major London and Liverpool merchant houses. Over half of these establishments were in Rio de Janeiro, a third in Buenos Aires and Montevideo, but there were many also in Valparaíso, Santiago and Lima (for example, Antony Gibbs, Duncan Fox, Balfour Williamson, Graham Rowe), in Caracas and La Guaira (above all, the House of Boulton) and even in San Blas on the Pacific Coast of Mexico (Barron Forbes).

The merchant house, which has been called the predominant institutional expression of British business in Latin America in the nineteenth century, existed primarily, of course, to import and distribute British goods: mainly textiles (cottons, woollens, linens and so forth), but also other manufactured consumer goods (such as ironware, cutlery, porcelain, glass, pianos, furniture, hats, stockings) and some capital goods and raw materials, especially coal. The size of the Latin American market had been grossly exaggerated at the time of Independence and hence quickly overstocked. Nevertheless in the early 1840s Brazil was receiving half its imports from Britain, worth £2–3 million per annum. This represented 5–7 per cent of total British exports — a decline from the 15 per cent of the 1820s, but still making Brazil Britain’s third-largest market after the United States and Germany. British goods worth another £2 million (5 per cent of total British exports) were exported to Spanish America (more than half going to the River Plate and Chile). By the early 1870s £25 million worth of British goods (10 per cent of total British exports) were being imported annually into Latin America (a third into Brazil).

At the same time British merchant houses handled the export of many local primary products: Brazilian coffee (here the firm of Edward Johnston and Co. played a key role, although the main market was the United States); Argentine hides and wool; Chilean silver and wheat; above all, Peruvian guano (natural fertiliser). The profitable trade in guano to Britain, the most important of the European markets, was largely in the hands of Antony Gibbs and Sons during the 1840s and 1850s (hence the verse well known in the City of London, ‘Antony Gibbs / made his dibs / selling the turds / of foreign birds’).

In general, however, most of Latin America’s exports stagnated during the second and, to a lesser extent, the third quarter of the nineteenth century, which produced a marked imbalance in trade. In some sectors, particularly in mining, but also in agriculture, exports fell well below the level of the late-colonial period as a result of physical destruction and flight of capital during the wars for independence, political instability in the aftermath of Independence and lack of investment in the modernisation and expansion of production. Not much capital was accumulated locally; indeed, there was an outflow of precious metals to pay
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for excessive imports of British consumer goods. Furthermore, neither the British, nor other foreigners, invested in Latin America on a major scale for several decades after the financial and economic failures of the 1820s.

Several loans to the new Latin American states, many in excess of £1 million, had been floated on the London capital market during the years 1822–5. By 1828 every state except Brazil had defaulted on at least the interest payments, bringing into existence a host of committees of anxious and angry British bondholders. At the same time, taking advantage of the stock exchange boom of 1823–5 numerous joint-stock companies had been created to explore the legendary mineral wealth of Mexico, Peru, Bolivia, Colombia and Chile. Only a few Mexican mining companies, like Real del Monte, survived the crash which followed. None were profitable.

During the period after Independence the great British merchant houses invested modestly in internal commerce, land, food processing, even mining, and also provided valuable financial services for British and local clients. Only in the late 1850s and the 1860s, however, was a significant financial connection re-established between Latin America and Europe, especially Britain. Barings, for example, floated a loan of £1.5 million for Chile in 1858, a loan of £1 million for Venezuela in 1862 and loans of £1.25 million in 1866 and £1.95 million in 1868–9 for Argentina during the Paraguayan War. Brazil and Peru, however, were the major borrowers, accounting for at least 50 per cent of total British portfolio investment in Latin America before the investment boom of the 1870s and 1880s. The first joint-stock enterprises, a new type of business concern with headquarters in the metropolis, invested in early railway development (in Brazil, Argentina, Mexico and elsewhere), in public utilities (for example, gas companies in all the major cities of Brazil), in land (in Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay) and in mining (in Chile). Significantly, perhaps, the first British commercial banks – the London and Brazilian Bank (1862), the London and River Plate Bank (1863), the London Bank of Mexico and South America (1863–4), the English Bank of Rio de Janeiro (1863), the London and Venezuela Bank (1864) – suddenly appeared on the Latin American scene and their business expanded rapidly. By 1865 £80 million and by 1875 £175 million was invested in Latin America, 10 per cent of total British investment abroad, most of it in government bonds and, to a lesser extent, railways.

In the economic history of Latin America the third quarter of the nineteenth century represents a transitional period between the immediate post-Independence period, which was generally characterised by poor export performances (with exceptions like coffee in Brazil, guano in Peru, sugar in Cuba) and consequent economic stagnation, and the ‘Golden Age’ of export-led growth (desarrollo hacia afuera) from the 1870s and 1880s to the 1920s. The impetus for the often spectacular growth of the Latin American export sectors in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries came primarily from international (including British) demand for Latin American foodstuffs and raw materials. It was made possible by the British-led revolution in communications
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and transportation, especially railways and transoceanic steam navigation and cables, and by a massive inflow of (mainly British) capital into infrastructure and, to some extent, production. This in turn was facilitated by a much improved business climate in Latin America, as the political instability in most countries after Independence gave way to stability in the form of both constitutional and representative regimes (for example, in Argentina and Uruguay) and dictatorships (as in Venezuela and Mexico) – all of which encouraged foreign investment. These changes did much to increase the flow of British capital to Latin America after 1880, although there were occasional disruptions such as that caused by the Baring Crisis (1890–1), after which new investment in Argentina (and elsewhere) dried up for a period.

The measurement of foreign investment in Latin America in the nineteenth century is a historical minefield. However, it would be generally agreed that British investment in Latin America grew from under £200 million in 1880 to around £1,000 million in 1913, a third in Argentina (which in some years, for example 1889, had absorbed 40–50 per cent of all British capital invested abroad), a quarter in Brazil and a sixth in Mexico. This represented 20–25 per cent of total British overseas investment and almost 60 per cent of all foreign investment in Latin America.

A large proportion of British investment in Latin America in the thirty to forty years before the First World War was portfolio investment (government bonds and minority holdings in foreign-controlled companies), although direct investment increased from a quarter in 1880 to almost half in 1914. The British investor in Latin America put more than a third of his money into government (federal, state and municipal) bonds. Barings remained the principal bankers of Argentina and a number of other Spanish American republics. (Between 1902 and 1914, for example, they were directly responsible for thirteen issues for Argentina or Buenos Aires totalling £27 million.) For Brazil it was Rothschilds. They financed, for example, the funding loan of £15 million in 1898, although Schroders led the consortium which raised the loan to the state of São Paulo in 1906 in order to finance valorisation, the price-support programme for coffee. Not only a large part of portfolio investment but also half of direct British investment went to finance railway construction – especially in Argentina, but also in Brazil, Peru, Uruguay, Chile and Venezuela. Throughout Latin America, besides passengers and imports, exports were moved rapidly and cheaply to the seaports by railways financed, built and run by the British – the Central Argentine Railway, the Buenos Ayres Great Southern Railway, the Argentine Great Western Railway, the Central Uruguay Railway, the San Paulo Railway which linked Sào Paulo to the port of Santos (one of the greatest – and most profitable – achievements of Victorian engineering), the Tarapacá Railway, the Peruvian Corporation’s Central Railway, the La Guaira–Caracas Railway, the Mexican Southern Railway, the Tehuantepec Railway and the Western Railway of Havana. The rail networks of Argentina and Brazil, in particular, expanded from less than 500 miles each in 1870 to 21,000 and 15,000 miles respectively in
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1914. In 1900 British-owned companies accounted for almost 90 per cent of aggregate railway investment in Argentina and some 15 per cent of Argentina’s total capital stock.10

The British also invested in banking and insurance; in shipping; in harbours and port works (Rio de Janeiro, Santos, Buenos Aires, La Guaira, Vera Cruz); in river transport; in telegraph and cables (‘All the earth is caught up in the net of English telegraph lines . . .’; wrote Eduardo Prado in Brazil, ‘powerful invisible nerves . . . connecting the most remote regions to the brain of the world, London’);11 in sheep farms in Patagonia and cattle estancias in Buenos Aires province and in the mesopotamian and littoral provinces of Argentina (in 1913 10 per cent of British direct investment in Argentina was in land)12 as well as in Uruguay, Paraguay and Southern Brazil; in meat-packing plants like George Drabble’s River Plate Fresh Meat Co. (1882), flour mills (Rio Flour Mills and Granaries, established 1886, was the most successful British manufacturing investment in Brazil), sugar refineries, breweries and textile mills (J. & P. Coats in Brazil); in nitrate mines (the British owned 70 per cent of the Chilean nitrate industry in 1890), silver mines in Mexico, Chile and Peru, copper mines in Chile, Peru and Venezuela, gold mines in Brazil (the St John del Rey Mining Co. in Minas Gerais) and oil fields in Peru, Ecuador and, most successfully, Mexico (El Aguila); and finally, almost rivaling railways in importance in the decade before the First World War, in urban public utilities. Urban growth accompanied export-sector growth and the British financed and managed urban transport companies, waterworks, sewage and drainage systems, gas and later electricity companies throughout Latin America – especially in Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Chile and Peru. The Anglo-Argentine Tramways Co. (1869) is a notable example: it had acquired by 1910, through a series of amalgamations and mergers, a network of 430 miles in Buenos Aires (75 per cent of the most extensive system in the world)13 and in 1913 it opened the city’s (and Latin America’s) first underground railway. Montevideo, perhaps even more than Buenos Aires, was a city almost totally dominated by British capital. As early as 1881 the British minister was able to declare that ‘all the industrial enterprises . . . which are of any importance are in English hands. Railways, Tramways, Banks, Docks, Gas and Water supplies have been established by English capital and are managed by Englishmen.’14 In 1890 the President of the Republic compared his position to that of ‘the manager of a great ranch, whose board of directors is in London’.14

To the enterprising British entrepreneur, Latin America now offered opportunities without parallel. Two outstanding examples of many who were tempted are John Thomas North and Weetman Pearson (who became Lord Cowdray in 1910).15 North first went to Peru in 1869 at the age of twenty-seven as the representative of Fowlers, a Leeds engineering firm exporting nitrate-extracting machinery. Within a few years he owned his own nitrate oficina near the coastal town of Iquique. After the War of the Pacific (1879–83) and the transfer of the rich nitrate provinces of the Atacama desert from Peru and Bolivia to Chile,
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North acquired the title deeds to the richest nitrate fields. Operating mainly from London, he also controlled the water supply, gas, coal and provisions supply companies of the key province of Tarapacá, as well as the railway linking the most important oficinas to the port of Iquique. In 1889, with the nitrate market showing signs of weakness and the Chilean government threatening to impose controls on foreign monopolies, the ‘Nitrate King’, who was by now a leading figure in English society, made an extensive tour of his ‘kingdom’; he was accompanied by a number of distinguished journalists, including W. H. Russell of The Times who discovered, for example, that the Tarapacá Railway was not, as had been reported, ‘a tramway ending in a marsh’ but a network of ‘stations, sidings, platforms, locomotive sheds … worthy of any city in Europe’. North, who met President Balmaceda three times, left Chile having successfully restored confidence in the industry and in his companies. The nitrate boom was over, however, and before his death in 1896 North, who had in his own words risen from ‘mechanic to millionaire’ through his activities in Peru and Chile, had quietly diverted his capital from Tarapacá to collieries in England, factories in France, cement works in Belgium, tramways in Egypt and gold mines in Australia.

Pearson first visited Mexico in 1889 at the age of thirty-three and during the next twenty years spent several months of almost every year in Mexico City. He became an intimate friend of the dictator Porfirio Díaz and, as Liberal MP for Colchester, was generally known in England as ‘the Member for Mexico’. His major achievements in Mexico included the draining of Mexico City and the valley of Mexico by means of a 30-mile-long Gran Canal — a task that had baffled engineers for three centuries; the construction at Vera Cruz, on Mexico’s Caribbean coast, of a deep-water port with three giant breakwaters, a half-mile jetty for ocean liners, wharves, warehouses, a railway station, pure water supply and electricity; and the construction of a railway across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, with a modern, well-equipped port at each end — Salina Cruz on the Pacific, Coatzacoalcos on the Gulf. In 1910, on the eve of the Mexican Revolution, after almost a decade of failure and competition from a subsidiary of Standard Oil of New Jersey, the Pearson Trust’s Mexican Eagle Co. (El Aguila) finally struck oil — the great Potrero Four well — and became immediately by far the largest oil producer in Mexico. Cowdray rode the storm of the Revolution, but began to pull out after the First World War and in 1919 sold his oil interests to Royal Dutch Shell.

During the period from 1880 to 1914 a dramatic expansion in trade between Latin America and Britain accompanied the massive increase in British investment. Although many Latin American foodstuffs (such as coffee, cacao, sugar and fruit) still could not compete with British colonial produce and were exported (often by British merchant houses and shipping companies) to France, Germany and the United States, Latin American exports to Britain quadrupled. In 1913 Britain imported primary produce worth £76 million from Latin America, which represented 10 per cent of total British imports and 25–35 per
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cent of the exports of Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile and Peru. Much of the increase after 1880 was accounted for by minerals (Chilean nitrates until the 1890s, copper from Peru and Chile, Mexican oil after 1910), Brazilian rubber, and wool, cereals and — above all — chilled, frozen and canned meat from Argentina and Uruguay. Imports from Argentina alone amounted to £42 million, 6 per cent of British imports. Britain was not only Argentina’s main market, but Argentina was also one of the main half-dozen suppliers to the British market and the second most important source of food for Britain after the United States.

At the same time Latin America in 1913 absorbed £38 million worth of British goods. This represented 25–30 per cent of the imports of most of the major Latin American republics — Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, Peru — and 10 per cent of total British exports. Textiles (especially cotton goods) remained the largest single element in this trade, but intermediate and capital goods — iron and steel, coal, rolling stock, agricultural and industrial machinery, telegraph equipment and above all metallurgical and engineering products for railway construction — made an increasingly important contribution. In 1899 Argentina had become Britain’s major Latin American market, overtaking Brazil which had held that position since 1868. By 1913 Argentina alone absorbed almost half of Britain’s exports to Latin America. Only the United States outside the Empire was a more important market.

The British communities in the major cities and ports of Latin America — Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Valparaíso, Santiago, Lima — now included (besides merchants) the managers and office staff of British-owned railways, public utilities, banks, shipping and insurance companies, landed estates, mines and even factories. (Charles Miller, the agent of the Royal Mail lines in São Paulo, is said to have introduced soccer into Brazil in 1886.) ‘The Englishman in Latin America’, wrote C. Reginald Enock in The Republics of Central and South America (1913), ‘is still to a certain extent a “milord” … generally not falling below a certain standard of education … He comes for great enterprises, his pockets are overflowing with silver, which he is supposed to dispense liberally … The lower class Briton is rarely encountered.’ Scattered throughout the subcontinent were small groups of skilled workers — anything from 50 to 300 men and their families — under contract to British-owned concerns: engine drivers, plate layers and fitters on the railways and in the railway workshops of Argentina; miners in the Chilean copper, Brazilian gold and Mexican silver mines; machinists at J. & P. Coats’ thread factory in São Paulo; millers at the Rio Flour Mills; engineers, carpenters, moulders and fitters in the Pacific Steam Navigation Company repair works and factory at Callao in Peru. In general wages were high, hours relatively short and conditions good. However, the vast majority of poor working people emigrating from Britain in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were directed by the Government Emigration Commissioners not to Latin America, but to the United States and, within the Empire, to Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. After the Famine in 1846 several thousand Irish settled in the province of Buenos