


Richard Speare: an early British artist in Brazil

Richard Speare: um dos primeiros artistas britânicos no Brasil

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ROBERT JOHN WILKES

Postdoctoral researcher at the Institute of Philosophy and the Humanities at State University of Campinas (UNICAMP)

 0000-0002-9207-508X

Abstract

This article is the first to examine a little-known British artist, Richard Speare (1785–1815), who visited Brazil in 1808–9 and exhibited three watercolours of Brazilian subjects at the prestigious Royal Academy of Arts in London. It presents new biographical information about Speare, including his involvement with the mission to relocate the Braganza royal family from Lisbon to Rio de Janeiro. The article also analyses two engravings reproducing Speare's drawings of Rio de Janeiro, which were published in a British magazine during the artist's lifetime.

Keywords: Travelling artist. Landscape. Rio de Janeiro. The picturesque.

Resumo

Este artigo é o primeiro a examinar o pouco conhecido artista britânico Richard Speare (1785–1815), que visitou o Brasil em 1808–9 e expôs três aquarelas de temas brasileiros na prestigiosa Royal Academy of Arts em Londres. Apresenta novas informações biográficas sobre Speare, incluindo seu envolvimento com a missão de realocar a família real de Bragança de Lisboa para o Rio de Janeiro. O artigo também analisa duas gravuras que reproduzem os desenhos de Speare sobre o Rio de Janeiro, publicadas em uma revista britânica durante a vida do artista.

Palavras-chave: Artista viajante. Paisagem. Rio de Janeiro. Pitoresco.

In 1810 and 1811, the artist Richard Speare (1785–1815) exhibited three pictures depicting Brazilian subjects at the Royal Academy of Arts, Britain's most prestigious exhibition venue. The works, probably watercolours, were entitled *The Hospital at Rio de Janeiro, Brazils* (1810 exhibition), *A view of the city of St Sebastian, Rio de Janeiro* (1811) and *Banana trees* (1811). They were among the earliest pictures with Brazilian themes to be shown in the Academy's famous summer exhibitions. Unfortunately, their present whereabouts are unknown. However, two engravings by Speare depicting views in Rio de Janeiro have been rediscovered, together with biographical details about the artist, which are presented here for the first time. They have shed new light on this completely forgotten figure, who, although seemingly insignificant in the history of British art, was one of the earliest British artists to visit Brazil and create visual records of its landscapes. They also reveal that Speare played a minor role in an important episode in Brazil's history in the early nineteenth century.

That Speare publicly exhibited his works is significant. Most historical British artworks depicting Brazilian subjects take the form of amateur sketchbooks (drawings and watercolours) and prints. Few exhibition paintings were produced, excepting the 101 oils of Brazilian plants and landscapes by Marianne North, although these only went on public display at the Royal Botanic Gardens near London in 1882, towards the end of the century.¹ A search of Algernon Graves's dictionary of Academy exhibitors, which covers the period from 1769–1904, has shown that thirteen Brazilian-themed works were shown during those years: seven landscapes, two portraits, two seascapes, one animal painting and one modern-life subject (see Appendix). Three of these were by Speare, meaning that he contributed the most works on this theme to the Academy's exhibitions. He was not the first person to exhibit such images: he was preceded by Sir R. Chalmers, whose *View in Rio de Janeiro, South America* was shown in 1797, but about whom little is known. This seems to have been the first Brazilian landscape to be shown at the Academy; it too is now untraced. Before Speare, another artist to visit Brazil was the prominent watercolourist William Alexander, who provided two illustrations for Sir John Barrow's *A Voyage to Conchinchina* (London, 1806), based on his own sketches made in Rio de Janeiro in December 1792 during a voyage to China.²

There is a record for a Richard Speare born in the parish of St Anne Soho, London, on 10 January 1785, the son of James and Mary Speare, and baptised on 21 January.³ This matches the address of 22 St Anne's Court, Soho, associated with "R. Speare jun." in the Academy catalogue for 1799, when the artist sent his first picture there (entitled *The cottage in Hyde Park*, n° 607). Therefore, Speare began exhibiting when he was only 14 years old. The young artist continued to regularly send works to the Academy: two in

¹ See BANDEIRA, Julio. *A viagem ao Brasil de Marianne North, 1872–1873*. São Paulo: Sextante, 2012.

² See BARROW, John. *A Voyage to Conchinchina, in the Years 1792 and 1793*. London: T. Cadell, 1806, p. 80, 135.

³ Identified in the City of Westminster Archives, London, using Findmypast.co.uk (accessed 13 July 2021).

1800, three in 1801, two in 1802 and three in 1803.⁴ The titles of these works demonstrate that landscape was his preferred genre. Speare's talents were further recognised in 1802, when his drawing, "a view at Eltham, Kent", was awarded the "silver pallet" by the Royal Society for Arts, Manufactures and Commerce in London.⁵

After 1803, Speare exhibited nothing for seven years, until he reappeared in 1810 with his *Hospital at Rio de Janeiro*. What happened during the intervening period is explained by the obituary for him rediscovered in the *Naval Chronicle*. This states that Speare "was originally destined for an artist, and obtained considerable proficiency in the polite arts", until he "quitted the pencil for the pen in 1803".⁶ Presumably, he had had to seek out more lucrative employment. He became a secretary within the British government, and first "accompanied the British Envoy to the Court of Wurtemberg [sic] in 1804; where he served with credit as private secretary in difficult times, and under arduous circumstances".⁷ However, Speare did not abandon his art; in 1804, for example, he sketched a battle between some British and French ships – a point to which I will return.

Speare's next position was even more significant, as he became the private secretary of Sir William Sidney Smith, a naval officer who had achieved a notable victory against Napoleon during the siege of Acre in 1799. Speare's obituary states that he joined Smith's suite in 1807, when the latter was about to undertake an important mission that is of great significance in Brazilian history: assisting the transfer of the Portuguese royal family, the Braganzas, from Lisbon to Rio de Janeiro, in order to evade Napoleon. The British Navy would send a fleet to escort the Portuguese ships across the Atlantic, in exchange for exclusive trading rights with Portugal's vast South American colony.

Speare accompanied this mission, and the *Naval Chronicle's* report of these events describes him undertaking a secret task for Smith early in November 1807, only days before the Braganzas' departure. When Smith's ship approached Lisbon, it could not enter the port because of a ban on British vessels which had been enforced at the end of October by Portugal as a last attempt to appease Napoleon. A solution was therefore arrived at:

⁴ *A view of Willsden church, Middlesex* (1800, n° 319); *A farm at Great Berkhastead, Herts* (1800, n° 450); *A landscape* (1801, n° 390); *The bridge, with part of the old palace, at Eltham, Kent* (1801, n° 490); *A house at Eltham, Kent* (1801, n° 966); *Willsden church, Middlesex* (1802, n° 1016); *Part of the old palace at Eltham, Kent* (1802, n° 1090); *A view at Eltham, Kent* (1803, n° 317); *Jedburgh bridge, Scotland* (1803, n° 454); *Roslin castle, Scotland* (1803, n° 654).

⁵ TRANSACTIONS of the Society, Instituted at London, for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce, v. 20 (1802), p. 388 ("Rewards Bestowed by the Society, from October, 1801, to June, 1802"). Speare's place of residence was given as Dean Street, Soho.

⁶ Obituary published in the *NAVAL Chronicle*, v. 35, Jan.–Jun. 1816, p. 175–6.

⁷ *Ibid.*

the admiral's secretary (Mr. Speare) was detached in one of those small craft nicknamed by sailors "beancods", to open some communication with our establishments at Lisbon. This gentleman, after being exposed to stormy weather in an open boat [for] 15 hours, delivered his despatches secretly to Lord Viscount Strangford [Percy Smythe].⁸

Strangford, fearing that his presence as a notable English representative would enrage Napoleon after he invaded Portugal, accompanied Speare back to Smith's ship.

As is well known, the Braganzas and their court left Lisbon later in November, in a fleet escorted by four British warships, and arrived in Salvador, Bahia in January 1808 before moving down to Rio de Janeiro. Speare probably did not accompany them on this occasion, as Smith, his employer, only travelled to Brazil in May 1808.⁹ In Rio de Janeiro, Speare made the sketches which he later exhibited and published in England. This ranks him among several other amateur or semi-professional British artists who travelled to Brazil while attached to diplomatic missions: he was followed by William Havell in 1816 and Charles Landseer and William John Burchell in 1825. Another artist who was in Rio de Janeiro at the same time as Speare was Richard Bate, a British merchant who first arrived there in 1807. An amateur, Bate painted many watercolours of Rio de Janeiro before he returned to England in 1848, although they were not published during his lifetime.¹⁰ Little else is known about Speare's time in Rio de Janeiro, as there is no other documentary material to go by. As Smith's secretary, he would have remained there until the admiral returned to England in 1809.

Back in London, Speare exhibited his three Brazilian works at the Academy. Despite their novel subject matter, the works did not attract any critical attention; no reviews mentioning them have yet been found. The pictures were painted in watercolour rather than oil. The *Banana trees* and *View of the city of St Sebastian* shown in 1811 were placed in the "Drawings" category, meaning that they were exhibited in a room adjacent to the prestigious Great Room, which was reserved for oil paintings. As Greg Smith has demonstrated, the Academy's "antipathy to watercolourists" and its preferential treatment of works in oil made it difficult for watercolourists to have their works treated seriously in the summer exhibitions.¹¹ This led to the forming of a separate Society for Painters in Water Colours in 1804. Although watercolours were still accepted for the Academy exhibitions, they were often relegated to the "lower rooms" at Somerset House together with sculptures and drawings, thereby establishing a physical hierarchy in which oil painting dominated in the Great Room upstairs.¹²

⁸ NAVAL Transactions on the Coast of Portugal, *Naval Chronicle* v. 21, Jan.–Jun. 1809, p. 379.

⁹ BARROW, John (ed). *The Life and Correspondence of Admiral Sir William Sidney Smith*. London: Richard Bentley, 1848, v. 2, p. 281. The British fleet that escorted the Braganzas was captained by Sir Graham Moore.

¹⁰ See FERREZ, Gilberto. *Aquarelas de Richard Bate*: O Rio de Janeiro de 1808–1848. Rio de Janeiro: Galeria Brasileira, 1965.

¹¹ SMITH, Greg. Watercolourists and Watercolours at the Royal Academy, 1780–1836. In: SOLKIN, David H. (org.). *Art on the Line*: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House 1780–1836. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001, p. 190.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 194-5.

Between 1795 and 1809, even watercolours by respected artists like Turner, Thomas Girtin and John Sell Cotman were displayed separately in the Council Room, which lacked decent viewing conditions for works on paper – Speare’s works before 1803 were also hung here. This worsened in 1810, when the accepted watercolours were dispersed around the lower rooms: Speare’s *Hospital at Rio de Janeiro* was therefore placed in the Antique Academy, while his two non-Brazilian works, *Cottages at Jedburgh* and *Monastery at Kelso*, were hung in the Library and the Model Academy respectively.

In 1812, Speare exhibited his final works at the Academy: an unnamed landscape and a view in Jedburgh, Scotland.¹³ He then left England again, accompanying Sidney Smith to the Mediterranean in 1812. Then, in 1816, the *Naval Chronicle* published the aforementioned obituary for Speare, announcing his death in Jamaica on 14 November 1815, aged 31, having fallen “a victim to the malignancy of the climate after an illness of five days”.¹⁴ At the time of his death, Speare was secretary to rear-admiral T. E. Douglas. According to a letter from Admiral Douglas, Speare had only been living in Jamaica for a “short period” before his illness.¹⁵ It is not known if he was buried there or back in England.

Before and after Speare’s death, between 1813 and 1817, the *Naval Chronicle* published seven engravings reproducing his drawings, two of them depicting Brazilian subjects. The first (Picture 1), *Fort of Villegagnon in the harbour of Rio de Janeiro*, appeared in the issue for January–June 1813. It represents the former fort on the Ilha de Villegagnon in Guanabara Bay, built in the 1550s under the command of Nicolas Durand de Villegagnon. The second engraving (Picture 2), published in the next issue, depicts the Chácara-Braganza, a house formerly in Nitéroí that was given to Sidney Smith by Dom João VI as thanks for his services to the Braganza family.¹⁶ It was therefore of special significance for Speare’s employer, and it may even have been Smith who requested Speare to sketch his new Carioca home. Both images were engraved by the artist J. Bailey and accompanied by written commentaries explaining their subjects.¹⁷ The commentary for the view of the Chácara-Braganza describes Speare as “an amateur, a civilian attached to, in a high situation, the English squadron on the South-American station”.¹⁸ That Speare’s drawings were done in Brazil also added to their novelty. For example, in 1808 the *Naval Chronicle* had published a view of the bay of Rio de Janeiro drawn by the naval painter Nicholas Pocock.¹⁹

¹³ Numbers 443 and 775 in the exhibition.

¹⁴ *NAVAL Chronicle*, v. 35, Jan.–Jun. 1816, p. 175–6.

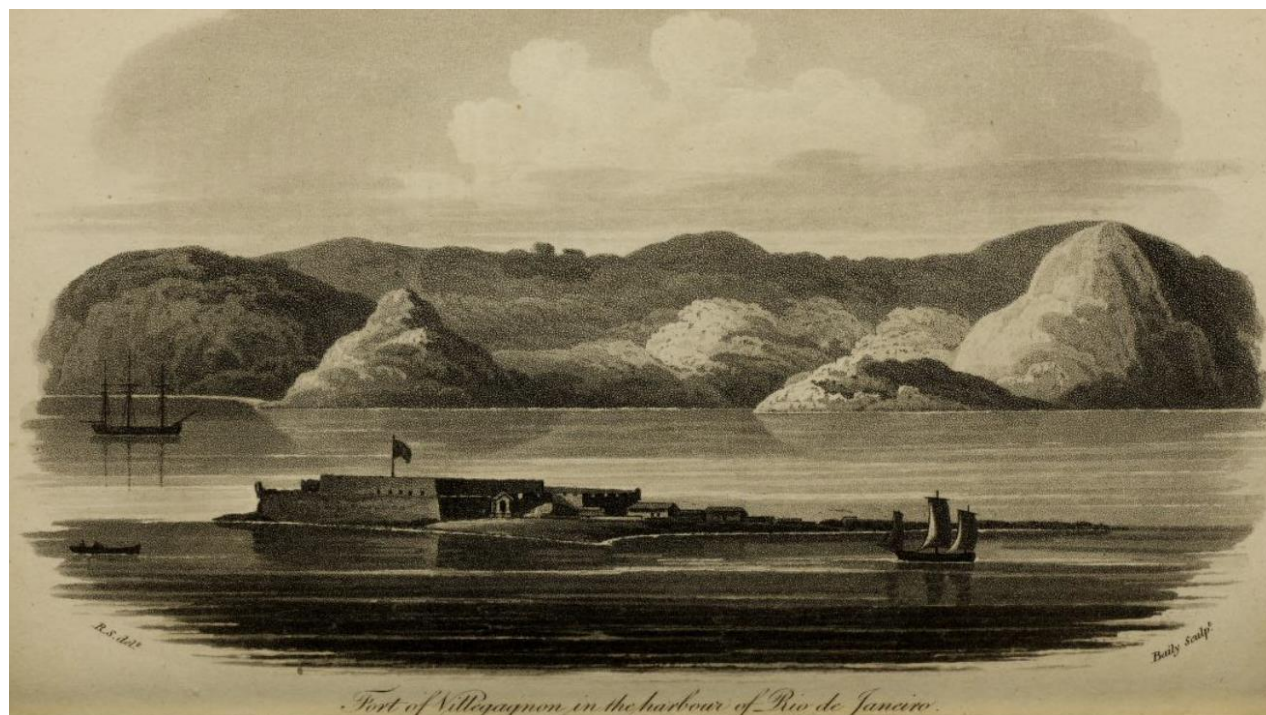
¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, v. 30, Jul.–Dec. 1813, p. 49 (commentary for Plate CCCXCV).

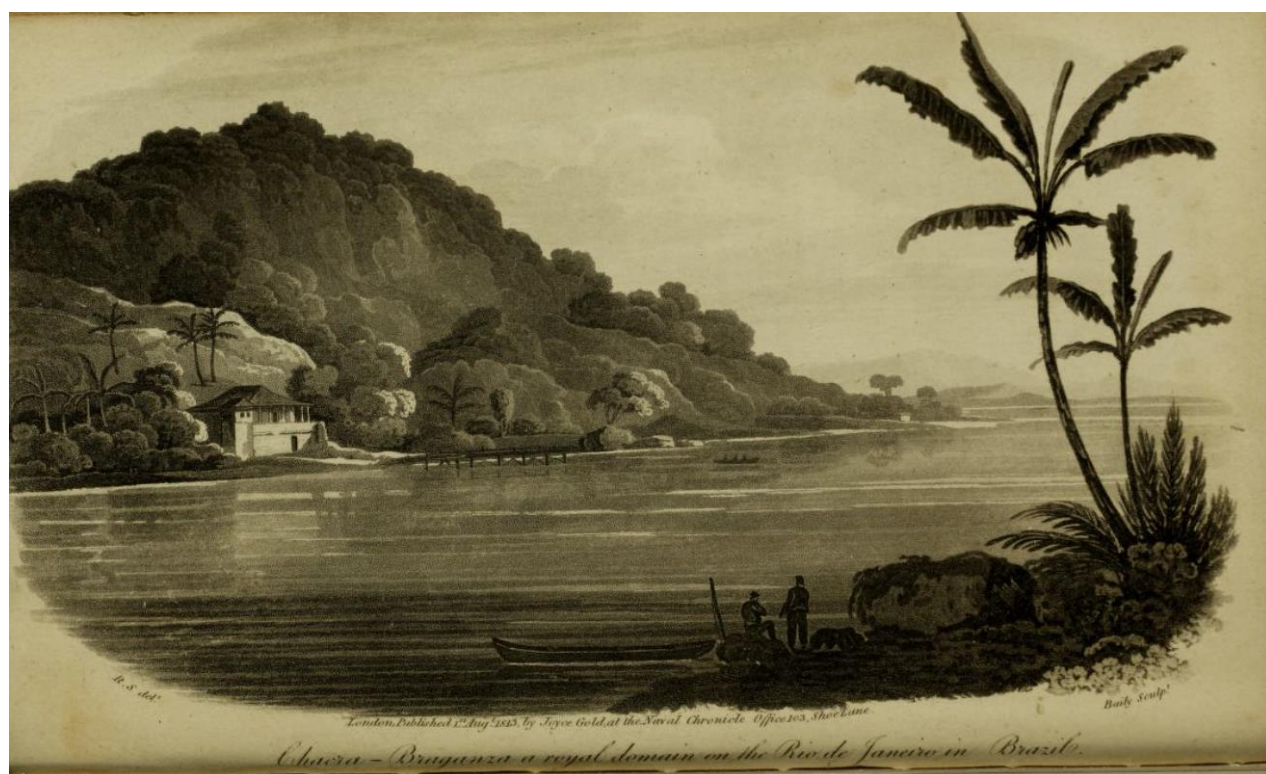
¹⁷ This was probably John Bailey (1750–1819), engraver and draughtsman, whose works are also in the British Museum.

¹⁸ *NAVAL Chronicle*, v. 30, Jul.–Dec. 1813, p. 49.

¹⁹ Pocock’s original watercolour, *The entrance of Rio de Janeiro*, is in a private collection; see <https://photoarchive.paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk/objects/427405/the-entrance-of-rio-de-janeiro> (accessed 17 March 2022).



Picture 1:
J. Bailey after Richard Speare, **Fort of Villegagnon in the harbour of Rio de Janeiro.**
Published in the *Naval Chronicle*, v. 29, January–June 1813, opposite p. 132 (Plate CCCLXXXII [382]).



Picture 2:
J. Bailey after Richard Speare, **Chacra-Braganza a royal domain on the Rio de Janeiro in Brazil.**
Published in the *Naval Chronicle*, v. 30, July–December 1813, opposite p. 49 (Plate CCCXCV [125]).

However, Pocock had never travelled to Brazil, instead making the drawing using information given to him by others.²⁰ Speare's engravings enable us to examine his Brazilian landscapes in lieu of the missing Academy watercolours.

Stylistically, the engravings are typical of British landscape art in the early nineteenth century, influenced by the picturesque theories popularised by William Gilpin a few decades earlier. The idea of the picturesque walking tour which allowed artists to sketch visually pleasing landscapes was already familiar in Britain by the early nineteenth century, as Malcolm Andrews has demonstrated.²¹ Gilpin's *Observations on the River Wye*, illustrated with his own drawings, was published in 1782, and watercolourists like Girtin, Cotman and John Robert Cozens came to specialise in images of pleasant rural scenes that were frequently exhibited and circulated before 1800. However, the picturesque was yet to be widely applied to a Brazilian context, as British travel to Brazil only increased after the Braganças settled there and frequent trade routes were established between the two countries.²² Pedro Corrêa do Lago has identified the picturesque as one of the major influences on foreign artist-travellers in Brazil, including French and German artists like Jean-Baptiste Debret (who came to Brazil in 1816) and Johann Moritz Rugendas (who first arrived in 1822).²³ Speare, in Brazil from 1808–9, therefore created some of the first picturesque images of Brazil, predating more familiar British productions like Henry Chamberlain's *Views and Costumes of the City and Neighbourhood of Rio de Janeiro* (London, 1821), Maria Graham's illustrations to her *Journal of a Voyage to Brazil* (London, 1824), Edmund Pink's watercolours of the early 1820s (which were never published in his lifetime) and William Gore Ouseley's watercolours of the 1830s, later published in his *Views in South America* (London, 1852). These artists undertook the Brazilian equivalent of the picturesque tours of Wales and the Lake District made by Gilpin and his contemporaries a few decades earlier. Graham's written descriptions of Brazil's landscapes in her *Journal* frequently invoke the picturesque; the word appears eighteen times throughout the text, nearly always in relation to nature. James Henderson, in his book *A History of the Brazil* (London, 1821), also described Brazil's mountains and bays in picturesque terms. Therefore, the picturesque was a concept that could be applied across both visual and written media by British visitors; it was a lens through which they could view, and therefore understand, the vast, unknown land which they were encountering for the first time.

²⁰ CORDINGLY, David. *Nicholas Pocock (1740–1821)*. London: Conway Maritime Press, 1986, p. 93.

²¹ ANDREWS, Malcolm. *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760–1800*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989, p. 24–38.

²² BELUZZO, Ana Maria. The Brazilian landscape through British eyes. In: *Brazil–Great Britain: A Relationship of Five Centuries [Brasil–Grã-Bretanha: Uma relação de cinco séculos]*. São Paulo: Associação Cultura Inglesa, 2010, p. 101.

²³ LAGO, Pedro Corrêa do. O olhar distante: A paisagem brasileira vista pelos grandes artistas estrangeiros 1637–1998. In: *Mostra do Redescobrimento: O olhar distante [The Distant View]*. São Paulo: Associação Brasil 500 Anos Artes Visuais, 2000, p. 67.

In the text accompanying Speare's Chácara-Braganza sketch (Picture 2) in the *Naval Chronicle*, the editor explicitly mentioned the "picturesque merits of this View".²⁴ Speare's drawing locates its manmade architecture within a lush tropical environment, while the slender palm trees, elegantly positioned on the far right and slightly stylised, are a useful framing device. The hill behind the house (probably the Morro da Armação), covered with foliage, is rendered using generalised forms and is softened at the edges, without minute detail. The two small figures in the foreground, shown at rest, create a tranquil atmosphere, as if inviting the viewer to rest alongside them. This is not a sublime image, wherein human figures are overwhelmed by nature; instead, they are in harmony with the scene. The same tranquility pervades the drawing of the Forte Villegagnon (Picture 1), with its placid waters leading to gently undulating hills in the background.

Speare's works recall those made by another employee of the British Navy who was also an amateur artist, Emeric Essex Vidal, who is already familiar in the scholarship on travelling artists in Brazil. Vidal joined the Navy as a volunteer in 1806, aged fifteen.²⁵ It has been claimed that he first visited Brazil in 1808 aboard the HMS *Clyde*, supposedly one of the British ships that escorted the Braganzas from Lisbon, but there are no extant artworks by Vidal from this date and the *Clyde* was not one of the vessels sent to Brazil.²⁶ Vidal did spend time in Brazil on three separate occasions in 1816–18, 1826–9 and 1834–7, making artworks during each visit.²⁷ He left behind a large corpus of watercolours made in South America; those from Argentina and Uruguay were reproduced as coloured aquatints in *Picturesque Illustrations of Buenos Ayres and Monte Video* (London, 1820), but his Brazilian scenes were not published in his lifetime. Like Speare before him, Vidal chose the Chácara-Braganza as the subject for a watercolour (Picture 3) dating from 1817.

Speare's and Vidal's drawings of the Chácara-Braganza anticipated Henry Chamberlain's depiction of the same view, published as a coloured aquatint in his *Views and Costumes* (Picture 4). Chamberlain sketched the house from the same spot, possibly looking south towards the Morro da Armação from the Ilha da Conceição on the east side of Guanabara Bay. In keeping with the picturesque tastes which persisted in the 1820s, Chamberlain's written commentary for his drawing emphasises the

²⁴ NAVAL Chronicle, v. 30, Jul.–Dec. 1813, p. 49.

²⁵ BIBLIOTHECA Americana, Part IX, Catalogue No. 549. London: Maggs Bros., 1930, p. 114.

²⁶ BELLUZZO, Anna Maria. O viajante e a paisagem brasileira. *Revista Porto Arte: Revista de Artes Visuais*, v. 15, n. 25, Nov. 2008; EMERIC Essex Vidal. *Enciclopédia Itaú Cultural*, Available from: <https://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/pessoa24554/emeric-essex-vidal> (accessed 9 June 2022). The British fleet comprised the HMS *Marlborough*, *London*, *Bedford* and *Monarch*; WILCKEN, Patrick. *Império à Deriva: A corte Portuguesa no Rio de Janeiro (1808–1821)*. Porto: Livraria Civilização Editora, 2004, p. 46.

²⁷ BELLUZZO, Anna Maria. The Brazilian landscape through British eyes [A paisagem brasileira através do olhar britânico]. In: *Brazil–Great Britain: A Relationship of Five Centuries [Brasil–Grã-Bretanha: uma relação de cinco séculos]*. São Paulo: Associação Cultura Inglesa, 2010, p. 103–4.

“peculiarly interesting and romantick [sic]” view from the house’s veranda.²⁸ Like Speare and Vidal before him, Chamberlain juxtaposed manmade and natural monuments: the house is nestled comfortably below the hill which rises gently, rather than threateningly, behind it. Comparing the three images also demonstrates the dramatic changes which the landscape underwent within ten years. By the time Vidal sketched the scene in 1817, the Chácara-Braganza was inhabited by Chamberlain’s father, Sir Henry Chamberlain, Britain’s chargé d’affaires to Brazil, according to an inscription on the watercolour.²⁹ The summit of the Morro da Armação, thickly forested in Speare’s drawing of 1808–9, had become barer, having been stripped of its trees. The smaller hillside to the left of the house, populated with palm trees in Speare’s day, had also been reconfigured – “tamed”, perhaps – into a European-style orchard, with rows of neat trees.

Despite these differences, the three drawings assert the British political presence in Brazil: the “small White house on the Beach”, as Chamberlain Jr. unassumingly described it, was the physical product of an alliance between the British and Portuguese governments, symbolising the solemn agreement made by the Braganzas. The *Naval Chronicle* highlighted this fact for its readers, calling the Chácara “a memorial of the gratitude of the reigning house of Braganza”.³⁰ (Besides the house, Sidney Smith was awarded a knighthood by Dom João, the Ordem da Torre e Espada or Order of the Tower and Sword.) By signing over significant trading rights to the British, Brazil became absorbed into Britain’s informal empire in South America. In a letter to Chamberlain Sr. in 1823, José Joaquim Carneiro de Campos, Brazil’s Foreign Minister, wrote of “how much we [Brazil] prize, how really we are desirous to obtain the friendship of England and her acknowledgement of our independence”.³¹ Chamberlain himself was closely involved with discussions between the British and Brazilian governments in the 1820s regarding a possible treaty abolishing slavery practises in Brazil.³² However, it is unclear if he was still living in the Chácara-Braganza; two watercolours painted by his son in 1819–20 suggest that he had moved to a larger property in Catete by that time.³³

²⁸ CHAMBERLAIN, Henry. *Views and Costumes of the City and Neighbourhood of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil*. London: Thomas McLean, 1822, unpaginated, commentary for the plate “Bragança”.

²⁹ See: <https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-4966360> (accessed 7 June 2022). The watercolour is inscribed on the verso: “Mr. Chamberlain’s house Braganza [formerly] Sir Sydney Smith’s -- Drawn by E. Vidal -- 1817.--”.

³⁰ *NAVAL Chronicle* v. 30, Jul.–Dec. 1813, p. 49.

³¹ Quoted in BETHELL, Leslie. *The Abolition of the Brazilian Slave Trade: Britain, Brazil and the Slave Trade Question, 1807–1869*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970, p. 46.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 38–56.

³³ The watercolours, both inscribed “M. Chamberlains [sic] House, Catete, Rio de Janeiro”, are now in the Pinacoteca de São Paulo (PINA07442 and PINA07443).



Picture 3:
Emeric Essex Vidal, **Mr Chamberlain's house, Braganza (Niterói)**.
Watercolour on paper, 25.4 x 35.8 cm, private collection.
Image courtesy of Christie's, London.



Picture 4:
Henry Thomas Alken after Henry Chamberlain, **Bragança**. Published in *Views and Costumes of the City and Neighbourhood of Rio de Janeiro* (1821), plate 15.
Image from the Pinacoteca de São Paulo.

There is an intriguing postscript to this story. In 1825, ten years after Speare's death, a work entitled *View on the eastern side of the Harbour of Rio de Janeiro* was exhibited at the Academy by one G. Speare. Curiously, this other Speare had begun exhibiting in 1810, the same year that Richard showed his *Hospital at Rio de Janeiro*.³⁴ Landscapes in G. Speare's name subsequently appeared in 1815, 1818, 1825 (the Brazilian painting) and 1826.³⁵ Richard probably had a sibling who either practised art themselves, or who decided to send their brother's works to the exhibitions so that his talents could be recognised posthumously; or a combination of both. This is supported by the fact that G. Speare's contribution to the 1818 exhibition, *View of Wilsdon Church, Middlesex*, may have been Richard's almost identically titled *A view of Willsden church, Middlesex*, previously exhibited in 1800.

John and Mary Speare did have a second son named George, who was baptised on 17 May 1787, two years after Richard.³⁶ For the 1826 exhibition, "G. Speare" gave their address as 113 Aldersgate Street, which corresponds with other recorded mentions of George Speare at this time. In 1823, a George Speare of Aldersgate Street presented a copy of Brook Taylor's *New Principles of Linear Perspective* to the same Society for Arts, Manufactures and Commerce which had awarded Richard the silver palette in 1802.³⁷ For some years, George Speare and Thomas Frazier ran a cabinet-making and upholstering firm at 113 Aldersgate Street, until the partnership was dissolved in 1833.³⁸ George was still recorded living at this address in 1837, while a death notice for a George Speare at Windsor, on 20 October 1860, describes him as "formerly of Aldersgate street, aged 75".³⁹ Presumably, this was Richard's younger brother.

Richard Speare's view of Rio de Janeiro exhibited in 1825 – the exhibition opened on 2 May – was a timely inclusion, as in March the British diplomatic mission led by Sir Charles Stuart had departed London for Rio de Janeiro, by way of Lisbon. (Stuart's suite included the artists Charles Landseer and William John Burchell.) The mission was widely reported by the British press; indeed, news of Dom João VI's formal recognition of Brazil's independence was circulating in the papers while Speare's *Harbour of Rio de Janeiro* hung in the Academy. On 4 May, two days after the exhibition opened, the *London Packet* reported that "the object of [...] Stuart's mission had been completely fulfilled", and that Stuart "was understood to be ready to sail for Rio de Janeiro on the arrival of his next despatches from England".⁴⁰

³⁴ G. Speare's exhibit in 1810 was entitled *View of Jedburgh Abbey, Scotland* (n° 333).

³⁵ These were: *View of Edinburgh Castle* (1815, n° 431), *View of Wilsdon Church, Middlesex* (1818, n° 592) and *Old house near Monmouth* (1826, n° 433).

³⁶ Identified in the City of Westminster Archives, London, using Findmypast.co.uk (accessed 13 July 2021).

³⁷ TRANSACTIONS of the Society, Instituted at London, for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce, v. 41, 1823, pp. 304, xxxvii.

³⁸ LONDON Gazette, 1833, p. 1229.

³⁹ THE CITY of London Poll-Book, Election 1837. London: John Rickerby, 1837, p. 3. THE MONTHLY Record of Births, Deaths, and Marriages, A—Z, for the Month Ending January 1, 1861. London: Alfred Knowler, 1861, p. 668.

⁴⁰ LONDON Packet and New Lloyd's Evening Post, 4 May 1825, p. 4.

Speare's painting would have offered its British audience a window into the distant city for which Stuart was bound.

That Speare's paintings have not survived – or, if they have, they are still unlocated – is typical of the relatively few Academy-exhibited Brazilian works that were produced. Only three of these are traced, beginning with Augustus Earle's oil painting depicting the *Gate and Slave Market in Pernambuco* (Picture 5). Earle, who may have received some lessons at the Academy but was not officially enrolled there, travelled to Brazil in 1821 and remained there until 1825.⁴¹ His painting was taken back to England by Maria Graham in 1824, in time for the Academy exhibition of that year. In the original catalogue entry for his *Gate and Slave Market* painting, Earle emphasised that it had been “Painted in Brazil”, also providing a specific account of what was being depicted: “The Police ordering the slaves to be housed, on account of an attack made on one of the out-posts by the patriots, in 1821”. Earle thus presented the painting as an authentic visual document of slavery practises with which to confront his British audience, with himself as an eyewitness.⁴² This painting is now in the Museu Casa Geyer, Rio de Janeiro (part of the Museu Imperial), having been bought by the Brazilian collector Paulo Fontainha Geyer in 1973.



Picture 5:

Augustus Earle, **Gate and Slave Market in Pernambuco**, ca. 1821–4.
Oil on canvas, 70 x 47 cm, Museu Casa Geyer (Museu Imperial), Rio de Janeiro.

⁴¹ HACKFORTH-JONES, Jocelyn. **Augustus Earle: Travel Artist**. London: Scolar Press, 1980, p. 2.

⁴² THOMAS, Sarah. **Witnessing Slavery: Art and Travel in the Age of Abolition**. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019, p. 188–90.

The two other surviving paintings are by the Scottish marine painter John Christian Schetky. They were hung as a pair in the 1834 exhibition and depict the attempts by Captain Thomas Dickinson to rescue cargo from a British ship, the H.M.S. *Thetis*, which ran aground near Cabo Frio, Rio de Janeiro, in December 1830.⁴³ Unlike Speare and Earle, Schetky did not travel to Brazil, but based his depictions of a British shipwreck near Cabo Frio on eyewitness accounts. The paintings are now in the National Maritime Museum, London.

Other works by Speare

Besides the two Brazilian engravings of 1813 discussed earlier, the *Naval Chronicle* published five further images by Speare between 1814 and 1817: a view of Cagliari in Sardinia, based on a sketch from 1813; a view of the Illa de la Quarantena in the bay of Mahon, Menorca; a naval battle between British and French ships off the coast of France in 1804; a view of a beach at Teignmouth in Devon; and a “portrait” of the H.M.S. *Union*.⁴⁴

Searches of museum collections in the UK have located original artworks by Speare. There are three pictures signed by or attributed to him: two watercolours in the British Museum (both signed “R. Speare”) and a small oil entitled *Ilkley, Yorkshire* in the Williamson Art Gallery and Museum, Birkenhead. The British Museum watercolours belong firmly in the picturesque tradition, depicting a watermill (Picture 6) and a barn (Picture 7). The latter picture could be the *Farm at Great Berkhamstead, Herts* which Speare exhibited in 1800. Speare’s style is also typical of British watercolour painting during this period: there is an avoidance of minute detail, while the pigments were built up in thin, watery layers and visible black lines were used to describe the leaves of the trees. As we have seen, Speare was predominantly a watercolourist, so the Williamson Art Gallery oil is an anomaly. Little is known about it, other than that it was donated to the gallery by a local school in 1981.⁴⁵ It is difficult to confidently attribute it to Speare without additional information.

⁴³ See DRIVER, Felix; MARTINS, Luciana. Shipwreck and salvage in the tropics: The case of the HMS *Thetis*, 1830–1854. *Journal of Historical Geography*, v. 32, n. 3, Jul. 2006, p. 539–62.

⁴⁴ NAVAL *Chronicle*, v. 31, Jan.–Jun. 1814, p. 476, “View of Cagliari – Sardinia” (inscribed “Rich.^d S. del 1813”); v. 32 (Jul.–Dec. 1814), p. 135, “Quarantine Island, Port Mahon”; v. 34 (Jul.–Dec. 1815), p. 485, “Action between H.B.M.S. Vincejo, John Wesley Wright, Esq. Commander and a numerous French Flotilla off Quiberon, on the coast of France”; v. 32 (Jan.–Jun. 1816), p. 136, “The Bathing-place, Teignmouth, Devonshire”; v. 38 (Jul.–Dec. 1817), p. 324, “H.M.S. Union”.

⁴⁵ See: <https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/ilkley-yorkshire-67713> (accessed 28 March 2022). Attempts have been made to contact the museum for more details about this painting, without success.



Picture 6:
Richard Speare, **A barn**. Watercolour on paper, 29.5 x 38.6 cm, British Museum, London.



Picture 7:
Richard Speare, **A watermill**. Watercolour on paper, 31.3 x 39.3 cm, British Museum, London.



Picture 8:

Attributed to Richard Speare, **Landscape (in the Lake District?)**. Watercolour on paper, 14 x 20.3 cm, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, USA.

The Yale Center for British Art in the USA holds a landscape watercolour attributed, erroneously, to a “Robert” Speare (Picture 8). It is unsigned and undated, but it was presumably connected to Speare because of its stylistic similarities with the British Museum watercolours. There is a photographed copy of this watercolour in the archives of the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, London, which is tantalisingly inscribed on the back of the print: “R. Speare / View at Rio de Janeiro / ex Girtin”.⁴⁶ This would suggest that the Yale watercolour is one of Speare’s lost Brazilian works and that it once belonged to Thomas Girtin, one of Britain’s most prolific watercolourists. However, there are some problems with this – not least that Girtin died in 1802, before Speare even travelled to Brazil. (However, as Speare began exhibiting his works in 1799, it is possible that Girtin could have acquired one of them.) Furthermore, the scene depicted does not immediately suggest Rio de Janeiro; it lacks the typical landmarks which attracted artists, such as the Pão de Açúcar, the Corcovado or the Morro da Glória with its famous church. It could just as easily be a view in the Lake District, as Yale suggests, or even in the Mediterranean – a region to which Speare travelled as Sidney Smith’s secretary. When the watercolour was sold in the

⁴⁶ See: <https://photoarchive.paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk/objects/405125/view-at-rio-de-janeiro> (accessed 17 March 2022).

twentieth century (it was bought by the American collector Paul Mellon), it must have been optimistically identified as a Brazilian scene, although there is little in the picture to confirm this.

This, at present, is all that is currently known about Richard Speare, an obscure figure in British art history. If it were not for the three Brazilian works which he exhibited at the Academy, he would not have stood out among the many watercolour painters active in Britain in the early nineteenth century. This is not to say that he lacked talent: he exhibited eighteen works from 1799–1812 (including the Brazilian watercolours) and had seven engravings published after his drawings. Although Speare's Brazilian pictures are untraced, the two engravings discussed in this article give some idea of the characteristics of the lost works, with their picturesque compositions showing evidence of the European presence in Brazil. Speare's involvement with the mission to relocate the Braganzas to Rio de Janeiro in 1807–8 confirms his place among other British amateur and professional artists who travelled to Brazil as part of diplomatic missions or British naval activities, such as Havell and Landseer. In this way, Speare's picturesque drawings published in the *Naval Chronicle* in 1813, and his lost watercolours exhibited in 1810–11, anticipate the many British images of Brazilian landscapes produced in the 1820s and 1830s by the likes of Graham, Chamberlain and Pink. It is to be hoped that more information about Speare and his works will come to light in future.

Appendix

Paintings with Brazilian subjects exhibited at the Royal Academy from 1769–1904

This list was compiled using Algernon Graves's *The Royal Academy of Arts: A Complete Dictionary of Contributors and their Work from its Foundation in 1769 to 1904*, 8 vols (London: Henry Graves and Co. and George Bell and Sons, 1905), available online on the Internet Archive (archive.org); also "The Royal Academy Summer Exhibition: A Chronicle, 1769–2018", an online database created by the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art (chronicle250.com). Titles and catalogue numbers are those given in the original exhibition catalogues. The artists' birth/death dates are only given when they are known.

1797. Sir R. Chalmers, *View in Rio de Janeiro, South America* (803). Untraced.

1810. Richard Speare (1785–1815), *The hospital at Rio de Janeiro, Brazils* (332). Untraced.

1811. Richard Speare, *Banana trees* (326); *A view of the city of St Sebastian, Rio de Janeiro* (412). Both untraced.

1820. H. Raper (“honorary exhibitor [...] of H.M.S. Tyne”), *View on the East Side of Rio de Janeiro, South America* (703). Untraced.

1824. Augustus Earle (1793–1838), *Gate of Pernambuco, in Brazil, with new negroes. The Police ordering the slaves to be housed, on account of an attack made on one of the out-posts by the patriots, in 1821. Painted in Brazil* (627). Museu Casa Geyer (Museu Imperial), Rio de Janeiro.

1825. G. [George?] Speare (possibly 1787–1860), *View on the eastern side of the Harbour of Rio de Janeiro, Brazils* (491). Untraced. Probably a work by Richard Speare.

1834. John Christian Schetky (1778–1874), *Captain Dickenson’s first and second plans for the recovery of the stores and treasure sunk in His Majesty’s late frigate Thetis, at Cape Frio, by means of a small diving bell from a boat, and a large one from the derrick, or large crane of 158 feet in length, fixed against the cliff, and rigged with upwards of 4,000 fathoms of rope* (432); *Capt. Dickenson’s third plan for the recovery of the treasure and stores sunk in His Majesty’s late frigate Thetis, at Cape Frio, by means of a diving bell from a suspension cable, the derrick having been destroyed by a gale wind, similar to that herein shown* (433). Both paintings are now in the National Maritime Museum, London, with the same title, *Salvage of Stores and Treasure from HMS ‘Thetis’ at Cape Frio, Brasil*.

1838. Frederick John Meyer, *Portrait of Samuel Finden, Esq., late of Rio de Janeiro* (272). Untraced.

1854. W. Larkins, *The Chevalier Cavalcanti d’Albuquerque, of the Imperial Legation of Brazil* (776). Untraced.

1856. George Lothian Hall (1825–88), *At Ingá, Nichterohy, Rio de Janeiro* (970). Untraced, but an engraving after the painting was published (undated, but presumably in 1856).

1879. Samuel Edmund Waller (1850–1903), *Portraits: golden-lion monkeys, River Amazon, South America* (962). Untraced. It is not known if Waller actually travelled to Brazil.