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Hello, everybody, and welcome to *Brit-es.com*. The relationship between Spain and Great Britain is as remote as the most ancient nation-states in Europe. We should really talk about Portugal, Castile and England (and let us not forget Galicia, the great loser in Iberian-British History). I would recommend reading Atkinson's classic, *A History of Spain and Portugal*, where it was all clearly explained sixty years ago.

Very well. The question is to feel comfortable in Great Britain being a Spaniard, and to share what is ours with the British who visit us, or love the same things that we do. I believe that is what our magazine should aspire to do.

I could write about many things in which the English are involved (sorry, the British) and Spaniards (sorry again, citizens of the Spanish State), for at my age I have quite a storeful of stories to tell. I thought of relating what the elderly Galicians in Patagonia told me about a certain ("stupid") Englishman who "never got the picture" because, instead of contacting them, he interviewed members of the British Club in Rio Gallegos. His name was Bruce Chatwin, and he was not told the truth about the anarchist revolution he was so interested in.

Chatwin's *In Patagonia* fails. The key to the story, which was given to me, is that the leader of the violently repressed revolution was from Ferrol. Name and dates were all confirmed at the Civil Register in the town where Franco, Pablo Iglesias and Concepción Arenal, among others, were also born. Too bad for Chatwin (you should read my Patagonian chronicles, and a book that makes me weep when I recall what I went through, *Viages no País de Elal, Travels in the Country of Elal*, which I will translate someday.)

But I'm straying now. I'll write about Argentina and the British at some other time, and I'll include photographs.

Now I want to talk about Ferrol, the invulnerable stronghold at the end of an estuary

that the British Empire always coveted. Some were born in Ferrol and other, like myself, arrived in a torrent of immigration that mixed Galicians with Spaniards and foreigners, many of whom were “English”.

Graham Greene’s statement “*England me fecit*” was paraphrased by Gonzalo Torrente Ballester, one of the greatest names in universal literature. *Don* Gonzalo often said “*Ferrol me fecit*”; and I proclaim it myself. Because Ferrol made us different.

Not long ago I coincided with Carmen Posadas at the Brussels Book Fair. We participated in a panel session on historical literature and attended a reception at the Spanish Embassy. On both occasions she observed how odd it was that English and not French was taught in secondary school in Ferrol (except in a French nuns’ school). The ambassador helped me explain to her that, since the reign of Ferdinand VI, there were always “Englishmen” working in the shipyards in Ferrol; and they left in 1936.

In the eighteenth century, European strategists were aware that “naval dominance is world dominance”. Maritime powers strived to compete but, little by little, demography made its impact: a ship of the line needed eight hundred crewmen; a frigate, three hundred. In the end, the only remaining powers at sea fighting against each other were Great Britain, Spain and France. The less populated countries gave up.

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This explains that, centuries later, words like “brush”, “job” and “factory”, became part of the local language as *brus*, *chope* and *factoría*; that children in the port drew the sailors’ attention towards the brothels saying *foqui-foqui* (as in “fuck”), or that work was done *filispin*, in other words, “at full speed”.

The first British experts arrived to work on the large wooden hulls of the 18th century; later, the engine specialists, who came when sails were substituted by steam in the 19th. And finally, when naval warfare industry was producing sophisticated cruisers and battleships in the 20th.

Perfidious Albion, greatly responsible for many horrors in the Spanish Civil War, dispatched a cruiser to the fjord in Ares, parallel to Ferrol’s. There she collected hundreds of British citizens who until then had lived happily in the area between both fjords.

Few would return, and it wouldn’t be before the end of the Great War, the preface of which had taken place in Spain. They visited relatives, at the most. The post-war era of

famine and francoism (pro-German in spite of their defeat), was no place for two centuries of coexistence with the British. Family names and street names remained behind; and the memory of many a “Miss” who was married and had taught us “I am, you are, he is...” when we were kids.

Some of these “Misses” continued to teach well into old age, to be replaced by academy teachers, men who were versed in maritime business where English was mandatory, especially since Ike and Franco had come to an entente and the regime had surrendered to the nation the Generalissimo most despised; he (as any native of Ferrol) never got over the loss of Cuba at the hands of the Yankees...

A few days ago I was interviewed about the “new Galician song” movement, in which I invested a part of my youth’s creative energy. With me was Vicente Araguas. We talked about historical figures who had struggled against the narrow-mindedness of the Franco era, and about ourselves and other people from Ferrol who had put Galicia on the map of the World with their songs, such as Andrés do Barro and Xoán Rubia. We were all contemporaries, colleagues and friends.

I surprised the interviewers with a detail that Araguas confirmed, being as much a member of the local bourgeoisie as I was myself (Vicente and Andrés lived in the same building; and I, almost next door, on the same square). When nobody knew English in Spain, Andrés used to make faithful imitations of Bob Dylan and Otis Redding: he learnt to play the guitar singing in English.

Those who were present making questions and taping us were surprised to hear the memories I brought up from the past, fifty odd years earlier. When poverty in Spain was such that record-players were rare and smuggled objects, it was normal to listen to songs on the radio. American songs were already the most popular in Spain after the regime opened towards the USA. People used to hum the songs, as they couldn’t understand the lyrics, and José Guardiola made pathetic versions of them in Spanish.

As kids in the Concepción Arenal Secondary School in Ferrol, we challenged each other jotting down the lyrics every time we heard the songs on the radio, and learning them by heart... I’ll never forget the sense of pride I felt when I turned up at school with the lyrics of a popular song. It went something like this: “Poetry in motion / walking by my side, / her lovely locomotion / keeps my eyes open wide”. I had just beaten a classmate whose brother taught at an English academy...

Ferrol me fecit. Spanish Pop star Andrés do Barro (five gold records singing in Galician) understood what he heard sung in English; so did Vicente Araguas, singer, songwriter and activist in university movements. This made them stand apart from the

major actors in the new Spanish song movement in the 70s. They didn't understand the Beatles' lyrics, for example.

I'll finish now with things about Ferrol, "where nobody wasted time learning French" (no offense, but that's how our seniors saw it). I remember the old Hotel Ideal, and had no idea, until a friend's grandfather told me, that it was originally named "Ideal Room". Neither did I know that the first cinema hall in Ferrol was called New England.

I'm eternally grateful to have become a part of Ferrol, at least for one reason: I learnt to understand English. At the Telecommunications College in Madrid I was a privileged student: when solid state electronics invaded it all, there were only books in English on the subject...

But that English which I'm still learning (for it will never be my homeland as Portuguese was to Pessoa and Eça de Queiroz) has not only been my language for study and work in the last fifty years. It is the tongue in which millions of cultivated people, by mere statistics, have been writing for centuries about everything.

Now that English has become indispensable, and an important issue for responsible parents, neophytes forget that what is most important about Ferrol's second language is that one can enjoy the magnificent prose of a distracted Bruce Chatwin, who went around looking for glyptodonts in Patagonia without consulting the Galicians...

Another time we'll talk about Chatwin and Antonio Soto, the revolutionary from Ferrol in the Argentinian Far South. To Brits and Spaniards in London, who so much history have in common, all the best.