

THOMAS BURGESS LETTERS
(1831 – 1835)
(CHARLES DARWIN HMS BEAGLE)

There are six Entire Letters in the Archive.

- 1 11 January 1831 Portsmouth H.Q. 11 January 1831,
Postmarked at London 12 January 1831
- 2 19 April 1831 Rio de Janeiro, HMS *Warspite*
Postmarked at Falmouth 24 July 1831
- 3 16 December 1831 Rio de Janeiro, HMS *Adelaide*
Dated at Rio de Janeiro 11 January 1832
- 4 29 June 1832 Rio de Janeiro, HMS *Beagle*
Postmarked at Portsmouth 30 August 1832
- 5 9 May 1833 Montevideo HMS *Beagle*
No Postal Markings except Fig. 1 - 1d paid
- 6 24 June 1835 Valparaiso, HMS *Beagle*
Postmarked at Portsmouth 15 October 1835

All are 'entire' letters (not enclosed in an envelope)

Letter number 2 has been torn, only affecting the address panel, actual letter intact

Letter number 4 has been damaged by a fire slightly affecting the address panel, actual letter intact.

Transcripts have been carried out 'as is' with spelling unaltered.

E&OE

Gerald J. ELLOTT
23 April 2016

Valuation of Archive £25,000

LETTER DATED 11 JANUARY 1831
PORTSMOUTH H.Q.

Letter addressed to Israel Burgess, Lancashire Hill near Stockport, Cheshire.

Portsmouth Hants Jan^y 11 1830

Dear Father and Mother, I write these few lines hoping they will find you in good health as they leave me at present, thank God for it, but I have to inform that I ham going on board his Majesty's ship Tyne to day she is lying at Spithead and we are going out as Supernumerary to they West Indies Indies but you must not write to me untill you get another letter from me for I can't tell what Ship I may join when I get out there but as soon as I join my ship I will write to you. I have nothing more to say but give my kind love to all relations and to all enquiring friends so I remain your affectionate Son T Burgess

Note

Spelling as per letter

He writes "ham" for am and "They" for the (most letters)

Date of this Letter incorrectly dated 11 January 1830

All Postal Markings confirm date as being 1831

**LETTER DATED 19 APRIL 1831
HMS WARSPITE RIO DE JANEIRO**

Letter (*Assumed*) addressed to Israel Burgess, Lancashire Hill near Stockport, Cheshire.

Address excised, contents of letter intact.

Riogenero South America 19th April 1831

Dear Father and Mother I write these few lines hoping they will find you in good health as it leaves me at present thank God for it and has been since I left my native land. I am now lying at riodegenaro on board HM Ship Warspite she is flag ship for the station and I cant tell how long I shall lay there when I sent you my last letter I did not know where I was going at all but when we sailed from Spithead we went to haverdegrass in france for to take in an english enbas soder and the next land we made after we left france was they Island of Madari and there we made they peak of Tennerife and there we anchored for three days and a very curious sight it is for it appeared above they clouds and they top was covered with snow whilst it was so hot on our Ships Deck that it burned our feet and from there we sailed for they Island of St Jagoes wich I believe is an african island but fowls and fruits is very cheap indeed and from there we sailed for america but I must give you a little description of crossing they equinoxnon line for I was shaved on St Patricks day in they morning and lathered with nasty coal tar and shaved with an iron-hoop and have been but on little while at sea yet but I have been in three quarters of they globe already you can tell my uncle Thomas that he told me a many things that I have found very true and with respect to sea sickness I was sick a long while for we met with a gale of wind in they english channel as soon as we put out wich forced us to put in they downs I have nothing more to say at present but I remain your affectionate son Thos Burges give my kind love to all relations and to all enquiring friends and as soon as you get this letter if ever you do get it for it has a long way to come please to write by return of post and let me know how things is getting in at home and wether Sister Harriet is got married or non- and tell Abraham Langson I would be very glad to get a letter from him that he might inform one how my old companions are all getting on once more so no more from me at present Direct for his Majestys Ship Warspite Rio de janaro South America or elsewhere

LETTER DATED 16 DECEMBER 1831
 HMS *ADELAIDE* RIO DE JANEIRO
 HMS *Adelaide* was Tender to HMS *Warspite*

Letter (addressed to Israel Burgess, Lancashire Hill near Stockport, Cheshire.
 Date of this Letter incorrectly dated 16 December 1830
 All Postal Markings confirm date as being 1831, posted 11 January 1832

Letter December 16, 1830 (Year should have been 1831)
 Reodeganeriu South America

Dear Father and Mother I write these few lines hoping they will find you in good health as it leaves me at present they pleasure it affords me i cant find words to express as I almost thout you had forgot me altogether or totally neglected me I received both letters together on the 14th of December and they reason I was so long before I got the letters was on account of my being left on board HMS Schooner Adelaid tender to they (Warspite) which she being on a cruise to they Cape of Good Hope and they isle of france **if you** and my letters were lost (*if you crossed out*) on board of her and she is but just returned I am very comfortable where I am altho we are almost always at sea very propable you have seen in they papers an account of they loss of HM Frigate Theatus that we lost on Cape free about 60 Miles from riodejaniro on her passage to england laden with money and bullion we have been employed along with his HM Ship **light** (*crossed out*) lightning in getting they money up which as been lost altho she as been lost more than twelve months we have saved they greater part of her cargo and are daily getting more by means of a ships iron tank made with a diveing bell they never wasted time is nearly expaired and shee verry soon expe cts to return to england but I have not yet made up my mind wether I shall return with her or not or stop out a untill I complete three years and then I shall have it my own power to leave they service, if I like because I think I am content myself at home for a while now and they time will soon pass away now I am out and it is a very healthy situation please to tell A Langson that now he is

LETTER DATED 16 DECEMBER 1831
(Continued)

page 2

married he perhaps will have more time and
and then be able to fulfill his promise in
writing to me I am very sorry to hear
of they Death of my Uncle and Aunt fleet
but it is a Debt we must all pay give my
best respects to mary massey and thank her
for her kind enquiries give my best respects
to Sister Harriet and she may expect a letter
by they next paket give my best respects to
James Brown and to all my old friends
give my kind love to my two brothers and
likewise to all relation and I hope they time
will soon come when we shall meet again.

So I remain your affectionate
Son T Burgess

Note

HMS *Thetis*

5th Rate 46 guns, built at Pembroke Dock 1 February 1817
Wrecked on 5 December 1830 at Cape Frio, Brazil.

HMS *Lightening*

This was probably the wood paddle gun vessel built at Deptford on 19 September
1823

LETTER DATED 29 JUNE 1832 HMS *BEAGLE* RIO DE JANEIRO

Letter addressed to Israel Burgess, Lancashire Hill near Stockport, Cheshire.

Rio de Janaro 29 June 1832

Dear father *(and Mother Recd answered)* added by third party

It was with great pleasure I received your Letter when I did for I was verry much affraid that I should not be Able to get it before we Sailed for Mountavida I have left they Schooner and I am now on board HMS Ship Beadle Surveying vessel and She is going going for A voyage Round they world and Instead of me g being home verry Soon it perhaps will be 4 or 5 Year before I See England again and I am Very happy that I have met with So good a Ship for if ever I do live to Come home I will be able to Sit Down and tell a good Story and Come home with my pocket well Lineed you may tell George that I have thrown Mt Red Gacket Away and turned Sailor in Stead

page 2

of Soldier I ham Verry well In health and I hope these few lines *wifd* will find you All *(wifd crossed out)* in good health at home and with respect to My Aunt Betty I have not wrote to her Since I left England but I hope you will write to her And tell where I am going to and tell *they* her Very first oppertuninty I will write *(they crossed out)* to her when I wrote these few lines to you I was on Sober Island and Siting Down among A lot of black men and portugues and they was jabling So that I Scarcely new what I did write but I will write again they Verry first oppertunity and I hope you will do they Same for a letter will always be ackceptable when ever it Comes and I will be verry Glad to get A little news Give my best respects Sister Harriet and to My two Brothers Give my best respects to all relations and to all

Page 3

enquiring friends Directf for Me on HMShip Beagle South America and where So I remain your affectionate
Thos Burgess

LETTER DATED 9 MAY 1833
HMS *BEAGLE* MONTEVIDEO

Letter addressed to Israel Burgess, Lancashire Hill near Stockport, Cheshire.

Dear father and Mother

I ham take they oppertunity of writeing a few lines to you hoping they will find you in good health as it leaves me at present I did not receive your letter untill they 26th Apr April I ham now lying at Montovedio after a five months cruize and I shall Teell you a bit of a story of what I Saw after leaving Reo De Janaro we anchard at Montevedio in They River Plate wich is a Capital Place for living for you will get good beef at they rate of a Penny Per Pound from ther we went to Bays Blanco and Survyed they Bay. It is on they Coast of Patagonia there you will get beef Almost for carrying away and deer you may Shoot So Many as you like and and Ostrich to for they Patagonians are very fond of horse flesh for they will kill one of There horses and kut it up and cook it and eat it on they Spot wich I thout rather curious I must now of go to Terre Del Furego wich is they most frightful **coa** coast I every saw for they verry high and they top is covered with Snow and they verry **high la** heavy winds wich make it terrible to Ships and they inhabitants are they most miserable beings in existance I belive for they have not neither

Note

Words **highlighted** have been crossed out

LETTER DATED 9 MAY 1833
HMS *BEAGLE* MONTEVIDEO
(Continued)

Page 2

house house nor habitation but a poor miserable place made out of Bushes wich is neither wind tite nor water tite and their food is cheifly fish and as to their Clothing they have got none with they acception of a peice of Seal Shin or guanaco Skin and they only part of their body that they seem to care about being covered Is just between their Shoulders for they will cover that when all they rest of their body is naked and they will come along side of your Ship in a canoe made out of they bark of trees and they have got some kind of black and Red and White Daub their faces with wich make them apear like So many merry andrews and what bit of clotheing they have got they will give it up for a button and from there we went to they faulkland Islands and we got a plentyful supply of wild geese and there is a great number of Wild cattle and Horsees and pigs on they Islands I ham verry Sorry to hear of they Misfortunte of My Aunt teell My Sister she must be content with A part

LETTER DATED 9 MAY 1833
HMS *BEAGLE* MONTEVIDEO
(Continued)

Page 3

of this Letter for I have only got one ...
penny Left and they are a verry Scarse
thing in this country but if a Dollar would
Do i could get one I wish her much happiness
But I expect she will have a pretty round
family by I come home I hope you will
deylay no time in answer this Letter fo if
you do it will most likely be twelve Months
before I get if ever I get at all for I do
verry Soon be out of they reach of Letters
alltogether for I shall be Down on they Coast of
Peru and Mexico and Down among the
South Sea Islands and there I shall *Not*
be able to Send one or yet receive one and
teel all my old particulars that if they
wish to send me a fey lines they had better
Deylay no time in writeing for when
we leave Montavedio we are going through they
Straits of Magellan I have nothing more
Particular to say at present but give
my kind love tpo all releations and to all
Enquiring friends but I Dont recollect Seing
My Aunt Lawton name mentioned in
any of My Letters. So no more from your
affectionate Son Burgess I will write again
as Soon as I can

Note

Words in *Italics* assumed

Damage to entire letter where red sealing wax removed.

Whilst the actual written letter is undated, the particulars on the address front side, are dated 9 May 1833.

LETTER DATED 24 JUNE 1835 HMS *BEAGLE* VALPARAISO

Letter addressed to Israel Burgess, Lancashire Hill near Stockport, Cheshire.

(Actual Letter undated) - Dear Parents

I take they opportunity of writing a few lines
 hoping they will find you in good heath as it leaves
 me at present thank God for it I have been waiting
 for a letter A long time and none appears but if
 you have wrote the letter is lost allong with HMS
 Chalenger She is lost on they west Coast of Chilloe
 I have nothing particular to say how my time has
 been spent since I last wrote to you last except that
 we have bee busily employed Surveying on they **Coast**
 west Coast of America and by they time you get
 this letter I shall have visited they Coast of Peru
 and on my pasage across they Pacifick and
 visiting the South Sea Island and Shortly after
 Christmas I shall lie at New South Wales and
 in 18 or 20 months I shall be in England I dont
 know wether you heard of they Earth quake in South
 America or not but we were laying at A place
 called Valdevia about 100 Miles from Conception
 and that City was Shook completely down to the ground
 I was there a few days afterwards and it was A
 Shocking Sight to see numbers of poor famileys
 without a place to put their heads in but under
 2nd page

a bush and where they houses were not shook down
 they Sea rose about its level So much above its level
 that it swept houses and everything away before
 it it is not of any use for you to write to in answer
 to this letter for it will not catch
 me before I get to england myself and Directly
 I arrive I will write Give my kind love
 and respects to all relatives and to all enquiring
 friends and when I come home I will give
 you all particulars respectin my Voyage

I remain Your Son Thos Burgess

Note

Words **highlighted** have been crossed out.

HMS *Challenger* was wrecked 19 May 1835 off the west coast of Chile

HMS *Beagle*

Royal Marine Thomas Burgess

HMS *Tyne* ADM 37/8417

Muster 23 October 1830

Not ticked in Muster Book October 1830 – June 1832

ADM 32/292 – HMS *Beagle*

Royal Marine 3rd class

Born Heaton Parish, Heaton Lane Stockport, Lancs.

Former Entry 14 June 1832

Entered 2 April 1833 from HMS *Warspite*

Woolwich 24th. Private. RM

Discharged 19 August 1835

Net wages L25.18.8d

Also included in the Archive.

Original Letter from the Admiralty dated 15 February 1835
Re Discharge on payment of 20 pounds.

DISCHARGE LETTER

