



Wellcome Film Project

Silas Mainville Burroughs: The Missing Story

Sponsorship and copyright the Wellcome Trust 1999

Searches and script by Len and Marie Goodwin.

Directed by Len Goodwin and Max Blythe.

Technical production: David Dillon.

On-location recording: David and Glynis Dillon.

Graphics: Lisa Hill.

Commentary: Len Goodwin.

Voice of Burroughs: Frank Ultsch.

Introduction: Sir Roger Gibbs.

Produced in the television studio of Oxford Brookes University.

Colour film, includes black and white still photographs

Duration: 00:29:20:24

00:00:00:00

<Opening titles>

<Gibbs to camera>

A great deal has been written about Henry Wellcome but so little about Silas Burroughs. Wellcome and Burroughs, both products of the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy, joined different American pharmaceutical companies. Burroughs came to London in 1879. He felt the pharmaceutical world was at his feet. How right he was. He sent for his old friend Henry Wellcome and in 1880 the Burroughs Wellcome Company was formed.



Wellcome Film Project

Burroughs provided all the initial capital and was very much the senior partner. It can be argued that but for Silas Burroughs, the Wellcome Trust and indeed Glaxo Wellcome would never have existed.

<Gibbs narrates over diagram>

Today the Trust has assets of more than £12 billion and is the largest grant-giving charity in the world.

<Gibbs to camera>

Glaxo Wellcome is one of the leading international pharmaceutical companies. A chance conversation between Len Goodwin, a senior figure for so many years with both the Wellcome Foundation and the Wellcome Trust, and Dick Stillwell, Silas Burroughs's grandson, has recently brought the Wellcome Trust and the Burroughs family together. Dick Stillwell has very kindly presented the Trust with all his grandfather's memorabilia including his extraordinarily interesting diaries.

<Gibbs narrates over stills, interspersed with talk to camera>

We also have now the Burroughs Room at the heart of the Wellcome Building. Over the past year or so, the Burroughs family have been frequent visitors to the building and it gave us all much pleasure when only last month *<next photograph>* two of his great, great grandsons came and had a good look around.

It is wonderful that for the first time since the latter part of the last century, for Silas Burroughs died in 1895 when only forty-eight, the Burroughs family is once again a part of the Wellcome scene. Len Goodwin now takes up this fascinating story.

<Goodwin narrates briefly to camera, then over film >

The Stillwells have been our neighbours here in Berkshire for more than thirty years, although we met them only recently. They had no idea that I had ever worked for

Wellcome Film Project

Wellcome and it was only a chance remark of Richard's that revealed that Burroughs was his grandfather. It was pure serendipity – I went in search of hay and horse manure and I came away with a piece of missing history.

The Stillwells know all about horses. This is the farm where I first met them. They run a well-known stables. They have trained and taught and judged horses and riders all over the world, including the British Olympic Teams. Richard himself is a famous horseman and so was his father Sidney before him.

<Richard Stillwell narrates over still photograph>

My father was a great horseman and he was a very quiet horseman with wonderful hands. He could drive anything from four-in-hand to tandem, randoms. He raced troikas in Russia. He was a great polo man. And he travelled the world; he went to Egypt, he went to Paris, he went everywhere there was to go with a horse. He loved hunting. He rode in his last race at the age of well over sixty, and he rode in the Merylyn Hum Cup[?] in America, which was some feat for an Englishman.

<Goodwin narrates over still photograph>

Richard Stillwell grew up in this house, The Limes in Windsor. His father had moved there in 1920 when he married Anna Burroughs who had been living there with her sister Frances.

<Richard Stillwell to camera, interspersed with narration over photographs>

My father lived in Edgeworth[?] House which was next door to the Limes and that is where he met my mother, Anna, who was the elder daughter of Silas Mainville Burroughs, and they married and we lived there in some style. We had a lot of staff. My father had a valet and we had horses at The Limes and my father was still teaching a lot of the aristocracy of England. They all used to come there for advice and he used to ride and show horses all over the country. And we lived there and my

Wellcome Film Project

mother had a car; the only car in Berkshire actually. And we really did have a marvellous time.

<Goodwin narrates over film>

Richard's wife Joan has strong recollections of Anna in the late 1940s when she and Richard started spending time together.

<Joan Stillwell to camera>

We met in 47 when Richard came out of the army, and the great thing was to be introduced to his mother who lived in this quite sizable house with two old retainers. And I was a little bit scared actually. She was a quite powerful lady but by that time I'm afraid a lot of the money had gone and she spent it quite well, <laughs> including taking the council to High Court over the lime trees that were round the house and they chopped them down.

<Richard Stillwell to camera, interspersed with narration over photographs>

My mother was extremely extravagant, but when she died we ended up with the house and the furniture which was all brought, or most of it, to the farm here. We also have all the boxes full of papers and documents belonging to my grandfather that my mother so carefully stored all those years.

<Goodwin narrates over film and still photographs>

All these things have been carefully kept by Richard and Joan and when catalogued and analysed will throw further light on the life and times of one of the founders of the modern pharmaceutical industry.

00:07:22:02

Wellcome Film Project

Burroughs was born in America but he came from a very old and distinguished British family. In 1302 they were established at Northam near Bideford in Devon. And they built a great house, Burrough House, with its seven gables which survived until Victorian times when it was pulled down and replaced with a more modern building. All that remains are the cellars, a watchtower and a bank in the grounds which is said to have been used by people for watching archery and other sports. The church dates from the thirteenth century and it has a great tall tower that used to be whitewashed to serve as a beacon for ships at sea. It contains a number of Burroughs' tombs.

They were great seamen. In 1556, Stephen Burroughs sailed further into the Northeast Passage than any previous navigator. On his first attempt he had a narrow escape from the ice. His brother William, Vice Admiral in Drake's fleet, led a raid on Cadiz in his vessel, The Lion, commemorated by a pub in Northam <*photograph of Golden Lion*>. And he damaged a hundred ships and burnt three castles. He was later granted a coat of arms by Queen Elizabeth I and made Controller of the Queen's Navy.

Nearly fifty years later, among the many who fled to evade religious persecution was John Burroughs, born in Barnstaple in 1611. He crossed the Atlantic and arrived in Massachusetts in 1634. Later he moved down to Long Island.

The history of the family in America has been traced by Richard Stillwell's uncle, Stanley. Many of them held high office in local government and in 1815 one of them, David, who was Silas Mainville's grandfather, bought 188 acres of land in western New York and that must have added to the family's fortunes.

Silas Mainville Burroughs, generally known as Mainville, was born in Medina, New York State, in 1845, the son of a lawyer and US Congressman who had started life as a merchant. Burroughs studied at the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and he qualified in pharmacy in 1877. His thesis on powders compressed into tablets showed how much more easily they disintegrated in water compared with the old rolled pills. Working as an agent for John Wyeth, he travelled to London where he

Wellcome Film Project

saw great opportunities for the sale of the new compressed medicines that he had studied.

He was wealthy and was already selling medicines under his own name when in 1879; he invited Henry Solomon Wellcome, another ambitious, young American working in London for McKesson and Robbins, to join him. They very soon created a thriving business.

Both had travelled widely and Burroughs continued to do so, leaving less volatile Wellcome to keep his eye on the company's base in London. In October 1881, Burroughs started on what was intended to be a short trip to the South of France on the steam yacht, Ceylon. For some time he had been considering a journey round the world to extend the business 'and make our fortunes'. He found the ship comfortable and convenient and so he stayed on board using it as a base for his business through the Middle East, through Egypt, and then across to India where he spent several months. From Madras, he took ship to Australia and New Zealand and eventually returned to America via the Far East.

During the journey he filled many notebooks – thin paper duplicate books that he used for letters, orders, instructions to Wellcome, religious notes and lectures, descriptions of scenery, and new ideas for developing, packing and selling his medicines. The notebooks throw an interesting light on his character: a devout Christian – the bible he carried with him is heavily annotated, interested in missions and good works, a bit of a dandy with an eye for the girls a keen observer and an astute and brilliant salesman. For instance, he wrote from India:

<Ultsch as voice of Burroughs narrates over pages from diary>

I would advise you brother Wellcome to get on social and business acquaintance with the head medical men, Indian Department in London. Get over some fluid extracts from Wyeth and have them tested both by the Indian and British Regular Army doctors at the same time they try the pills and tablets.

Wellcome Film Project

Please send to the following important and leading doctors who can and will probably do us lots of good: special pocket cases, number 11 or some good style and with supplement inside. Those marked star are most important: Professor Henry Cook MD, Bombay; Professor Blane MD, Bombay; Dr Cody, Bombay.

<Goodwin continues narration>

And he wrote from Australia:

<Ultsch as voice of Burroughs narrates over film>

The doctors treat me straight and like our stuff. If we keep it before them constantly, we are in for a fine trade here. I think we should have a salesman or a traveller constantly here in Australia looking after our interests. If we don't, Warner, who has a man here most of the time, or Parke Davis who have Mr Lakeman looking after their interests, these folks will get the start of us. I can get a good man here, a thorough young gentleman, thoroughly honest, reliable and competent.

<Goodwin continues narration over film>

He saw the need to protect his goods against tropical climates.

<Ultsch as voice of Burroughs narrates over pages from diary>

Kanpur March 82. Re: Bottling of extract of malt and malt and oil. No one who has not been here in the summer has any idea of the heat. It's often a 130 in the shade, the wind blowing like hot air from a furnace. I don't think that our goods are generally exposed to such heat but they may in transportation be left in the direct sun heat which is nearly enough to set fire to them. In manufacturing extract of malt, it is not enough that it should be hot up to 125 or 130 degrees. The bottle should be hot also when filled and corked immediately,

Wellcome Film Project

the corks being first soaked in hot water containing salicylic acid in good proportion.

00:14:43:20

<Goodwin continues narration over film>

He was constantly thinking up improvements to the sample cases that he had devised.

<Ultsch as voice of Burroughs narrates over pages from diary>

Bombay, January 82. Re: vial samples for India and all tropical climates. All should be in bottles and they should be put in little cases of polished or varnished wood. Pine is good enough but they can be made cheaply in America. The cover can also be made of wood and fit on like a card case. The vials can be placed as per sketch.

Gujarat, February 82. Re: pocket sample cases. I've got an idea about these that beats the wooden one out of sight, I think. It's this: make them out of some sort of coloured tin. There's no use for partitions. The bottles will not break if placed side by side or, if you like, a wooden holder could be used with cover of metal as per illustration. I think we can sell a lot of pocket cases, all filled with our medicines if we get them up of this metal. They will be strong, light, handsome and at such a reasonable price that the druggist will buy them already filled to sell, instead of the old-fashioned pocket cases of leather that cost as much empty as ours would full.

Re: large medicine chest. The door could be made to slide upward or open at side or downward to make a table, though I think the slide the simplest. I append a sketch of what I would suggest the chest be somewhat like. Mahogany will be the best wood.

Wellcome Film Project

<Goodwin continues narration over film>

The cases became an important symbol of the quality of the firm's products and were presented to Burroughs' friend H M Stanley and other explorers and famous people including Gladstone.

He was an acute observer and tireless traveller.

<Ultsch as voice of Burroughs narrates over pages from diary>

Bombay, January 82. The weather's much cooler now. Still, the native children roll about the doorsteps with not a stitch to cover them and the grown-up people wear mostly the thinnest cotton or linen garments, while many have only a white cloth about the loins. Along the street and especially under the awnings, like the wide one before the esplanade hotel, the native people by scores are found stretched out and sound asleep on the pavement at any time after 9 o'clock.

<Goodwin continues narration over page from diary>

Later from Tasmania he wrote:

<Ultsch as voice of Burroughs narrates over pages from diary>

A rainy morning is slowly clearing to a sunny afternoon. Before dawn there was a heavy downpour and the crowd of passengers on the wards and the upper decks of the SS Flinders parted in a sorrowful mist from the friends come down to see them off. The channel of the Tamar is so narrow at Launceston Wharfs that two steamers as large as this could hardly pass each other full speed. On still evenings, can be heard the echo of the rapids up the rocky glen beyond the bridge. The fall of water near Launceston from this romantic stream is sufficient to supply it with great power for manufacturing. It is proposed, I believe, to employ this power for lighting the city by electricity.

Wellcome Film Project

<Goodwin to camera>

Burroughs took his religion very seriously.

<Ultsch as voice of Burroughs narrates over pages from diary>

Dear Pastor, I know you will be glad to attend to my request. It is that you and yours will sometimes remember in your prayers to God my humble self who though separated by distance I'm with you often in thought and in spirit also when I read your prayers and sermons in The Christian Chronicle. Will you pray sometimes for my perfect consecration to the service of our Lord? I want to be a thorough Christian in every thought, word and act.

<Goodwin narrates over film>

Although at the time not an abstainer, he worried about the alcohol in his Beef and Iron Wine.

<Ultsch as voice of Burroughs narrates over pages from diary>

Melbourne, September 14th 82. To Joseph Cook Esquire. Your advice may help me out of a difficulty. Among a number of preparations which we supply to the medical profession is one containing wine and called Beef and Iron Wine. Whilst it has been found to be a useful stimulant in medicine, I feel anxious lest it should be a cause of stumbling to some. I have been thinking of dropping it altogether or, as it is considerably prescribed, of putting in some caution in the directions. It has been found to be useful in dipsomania. I'll send you a copy of the Lancet with remarks upon it. Your advice will be highly appreciated.

<Goodwin narrates over photograph>

And he had an eye for pretty girls.

Wellcome Film Project

<Ultsch as voice of Burroughs narrates over film>

Dear Miss Susie. What shall a fellow do? There are Miss A and Miss B, the lovely daughters of two of the principal medical men here in Bombay. Miss A is a real Indian beauty with those two soft bright eyes and such a lovely complexion and pretty face.

Melbourne, March 83. It was a lovely evening with a fresh breeze and a rippling blue sea. Several ships we overtook with all their sails set and they did look splendidly. There were some other very nice-looking young ladies on board and I would have so much enjoyed their acquaintance. Oh dear, they are so wonderfully attractive – the lovely, opposite sex.

Sydney, November 83. Whatever the weather might be, if she with her smiles were near, the place would be a paradise. I found a pretty basket in the market place and sent it to her full of flowers. I wonder if she'll guess who sent it.

<Goodwin narrates over photograph>

All this time, of course, Wellcome was running the business in London and there are occasional signs that Burroughs was becoming irritated with him.

<Ultsch as voice of Burroughs narrates over film>

Dear Wellcome, received your letter here saying that five hundred lots of samples etcetera had been sent to Madras. I'm rather surprised that part of them will not be sent to Calcutta and Bombay. I think that a hundred pounds of our goods would have been consumed in Bombay alone if they had been there in the market. Unless you are going to pay some attention to such matters of vital importance which...<voice fades out>

Wellcome Film Project

Calcutta, March 28th 82. In rather ill humour on account of Wellcome who was in want of a dose of liver pills, a Turkish bath and shampoo, sleep, diet, Pil Phus, nux, iron, quin and zinc and a thorough reorganising in fact, for I believe he's got the jaundice bad and sees things green and black with no ends of snakes in the grass and blue devils everywhere.

<Goodwin narrates>

Burroughs left England in 1881 and completed his world trip in 1883 in America, where he married Olive Chase in the following January. And he brought her back to England and they took up residence in Surbiton.

<Joan Stillwell to camera>

They had two daughters, Anna and Frances, and a son, Stanley, who was named after Mainville's very dear friend Stanley, the explorer. He continued to travel and was a very devoted father because he sent his family postcards nearly every day, some of which are addressed to his wife with her pet name Chicksy which he always called her.

00:22:16:02

<Goodwin narrates over film>

The business with its headquarters in Snow Hill, Holborn, prospered. The name Tabloid was registered and Wellcome fought off competitors. The firm's first factory at Wandsworth was burnt down and replaced in 1889 by a larger one at Dartford where Burroughs' radical liberal political principles were given full rein. He campaigned for free trade and free travel across frontiers and supported the political reformer Henry George. He was a well-known lecturer and a prolific writer publishing many political pamphlets and articles to support his utopian dreams, and in lighter vein a comic opera entitled "The Good Pirates".

Wellcome Film Project

<Richard Stillwell to camera, interspersed with narrations over photographs>

He championed women's rights and was one of the first employers in Britain to introduce an eight-hour day. For his staff he provided a share of the company's profits and sports facilities. He was himself a keen cyclist and in 1893 bought a bicycle for fifteen pounds which he used to travel between Dartford and Snow Hill.

<Goodwin narrates over film and then to camera>

He entertained generously; Wellcome thought too generously. And the great party with fireworks was held at Dartford at the opening of the new factory. The staff loved him – he gave them Christmas presents and mementos of his frequent travels. He gave large sums to charity and was the chief fundraiser for the Livingstone Memorial Hospital in Dartford, opening the appeal with a personal gift of a thousand pounds.

<Ultsch as voice of Burroughs narrates over film>

Dear Mr Searl, this paper will constitute an order for starting a hospital fund for the building of the proposed hospital in Dartford. Let this be as a Christmas present from me or rather from the prosperity which providence has bestowed. I have more pleasure in doing this than I would in spending the money on a house for myself because the sick poor need a house and care more than I do.

<Goodwin narrates over film, interspersed with talk to camera>

A memorial can be seen in the Silas Ward of the hospital which is still very active today.

But he quarrelled with Wellcome. Burroughs was a politician – brilliant, impetuous, romantic and of a completely different temperament from the more practical Wellcome. Burroughs was determined to remain in charge and tried to get rid of his

Wellcome Film Project

partner. Bitter disagreements led to legal battles that were only resolved by Burroughs early death in 1895.

In the autumn of 1894, he set forth on a European cycling tour with his sister Lena. They went through the Black Forest on the Tyrol and one day they went a hundred and ten kilometres. On his return he developed a cough and he was advised to winter in the Riviera, where he and his sister Lena spent Christmas. The postcards to his children show that the weather was bad and that it was snowing. His last card to Stanley, written from San Remo on January 28th says:

<Ultsch as voice of Burroughs narrates over postcard>

Last night there was snow here and everyone was surprised for it is unusual to see the palm branches white. We expect to cycle to Bordighera today.

<Goodwin narrates over film>

But instead he contracted pneumonia and died in Monte Carlo a week later. It was a tragedy. It caused widespread shock and messages of condolence came in from every side. His will shows that his widow Olive received four twenty-fourths, each of his children three twenty-fourths and his employees one twenty-fourth of his estate. The rest went to his favoured missions and charities.

A plaque was placed in the City Temple near his offices in Snow Hill. The employees of Burroughs Wellcome & Company have erected this tablet to place on record the esteem and affection in which they hold his memory, their grateful recognition of his constant desire to promote their happiness and welfare, and their deep sorrow at his death.

In accordance with the original deed of partnership, Wellcome bought Burroughs share of the company. Olive was very bitter and angry and after her death in 1901 the children were brought up by guardians. Stanley went to America and became a



Wellcome Film Project

lawyer. The two girls were educated in Germany; they travelled in Europe and America and finally in 1913 they settled in England and bought The Limes.

How fortunate that they kept their father's possessions and papers. We can now get much closer to this remarkable Victorian gentleman. Enthusiastic, bursting with ideas; his tireless pursuit of quality, style and new methods for marketing his goods were way in advance of his time.

<Goodwin to camera>

And so were his staff relations. He was kind, friendly and generous and did his best to make the world a better place for everyone. His name lives on in America in the grants given by the Burroughs Wellcome Fund, and, I think it would please him also in his own community in Dartford, where his factory a hundred years on, is still known to those who live there as Burroughs's.

<End credits>

<In addition to those listed at the beginning of the transcription>

With grateful acknowledgement, this recording was made with the assistance of:

Richard and Joan Stillwell

Elizabeth Burroughs

Marilyn Northcott

Jean Devey

Frank Webb

Carol Beadle

George and Jean Stewart

Patt Wiggett



Wellcome Film Project

Mark Myers

and colleagues at the North Devon Maritime Museum

The Trustees of the National Museums and Galleries Merseyside

The British Library

John Davies

Sarah Flynn

at Glaxo Wellcome

Robert Howells

Michael Clark

at Wellcome Trust

Julia Sheppard and staff at the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine

Sarah Janet Kent and the staff of the Livingstone Hospital Dartford Kent

The School of Biological and Molecular Sciences, Oxford Brookes University