

Extracts from the Diary of a Member of the  
Short Brothers Technical Team trip to Japan in 1921

## The Promised Land of the Rising Sun



Pictures and additional material by Ralph Armsby, grandson.  
Special thanks to Judy Armsby,  
for her patient proof reading and corrections.  
Some of the language and grammar is of the time.

## **John Leslie Buckett.**

John, my maternal grandfather, known as 'Les' by the family, was born in 1895 in Norwood and lived for a time in Aylesbury, Bucks. Around the time he started work at Short Brothers he moved to the Rochester area where the Sea Plane Works were situated on the banks of the river Medway. He went to Japan with a team of engineers from Short Brothers in 1921 as an instructor. On his voyage to Japan and while working there he kept a handwritten diary. I have decided to type it up and to include some photos taken at the time, contemporary postcards, and other pictures. I've also added some notes from online research. All footnotes are my own and I have amended some of the original punctuation to aid reading. The diary captures a sense of social history and life in 1920s Japan. For instance, he describes frequent tea dances, sea swimming, festivals, visits to shrines, earthquakes, and an ascent of Mount Fuji. I hope you find it as fascinating as I do.

## **A jump start to Japanese Naval Aviation**

In 1902 Great Britain and Japan became allies when each of them signed the Anglo-Japanese Alliance to safeguard their interests in Asia. Short Brothers, or Shorts, were involved after a request for a naval aviation mission to be sent to Japan. This was controversial and in spite of concerns from the Admiralty, the Foreign Office, Air Ministry, and Department of Trade were in favour. With some lobbying from the aircraft industry, a compromise solution was agreed, and a civil aviation mission was set up in 1921. It was known as The British Aeronaval Technical Mission to Japan. It was also referred to as the Sempill Mission after its leader Captain William Forbes-Sempill. Activities centred around the Kasumigaura Airfield and the dockyard at Taura. British land and sea aircraft were supplied to the Japanese and training given on carrier landings etc.

The Japanese began the production of flying boats with the assistance the Short Brothers team from 1921.

## **Sources:**

**US Naval Institute** – a full account of the mission and some of its consequences.

<https://www.usni.org/magazines/naval-history-magazine/2019/december/jump-starting-japanese-naval-aviation>

**Imperial War Museum**

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205092631>

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[www.shortbrothersaviationpioneers.co.uk](http://www.shortbrothersaviationpioneers.co.uk)

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## The Voyage from London to Japan

March 5<sup>th</sup>, 1921

Our party, twenty in number left London for the promised Land of the Rising Sun after a glorious send off from those we left at the Short Brothers Seaplane Works of Rochester.



*Travelling to Tilbury from Rochester by charabanc.  
Les is on the back row, far right*

After being photographed many times and almost had our hands shaken from us by our friends, who had gathered on the quay at Tilbury, we got under way. I next turned my attention to writing letters home, as I wished to make known to them what I had been doing during my last week in Rochester. Having completed them they were handed to the pilot who took them ashore when leaving our ship at Dover.



*Boarding the S.S. Iyo Mara at Tilbury and talking with friends on the ferry boat*



*The Team aboard the S.S. Iyo Mara*



*The S.S. Iyo Mara at anchor, Tilbury*

### **March 6th, 1921**

Most of this day spent in making myself familiar with the general rules and conditions of the ship. At dusk the tiny lights of Folkestone and Dover could just be seen receding out of sight. Nothing else very exciting happened today except some of the funny chatter of the little Japanese stewards, which is beyond me to write herein.

### **March 7th, 1921**

Bay of Biscay reached and at this stage of the voyage most of us were "conked out". By the time we had had our dinner the boat was assuming some curious angles. Plates and dishes were giving us some fine ideas and exhibitions of their mastery of the noble art of juggling. Unfortunately, two bottles broke their necks in the attempt.

Some duck we had served for dinner is worthy of note. I think the Japanese word duck must mean ostrich, for the proportions of it were enormous and quite unlike the anatomy of any cooked bird I have seen.

### **March 8<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Indeed, a most delightful morning with brilliant sunshine and a refreshing breeze. As I write, most of the party is playing deck golf. This is a most interesting game, full of thrills and excitement. We have passed several ships this morning and it is apparent that most of them are on their way to the old country. Another glimpse of the Spanish coast has just loomed up; it is a great distance off and can only just be discerned in the morning mist.

### **March 9<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Yet another fine day at a close. This morning Cape St. Vincent hove into view. This is the most southerly point of Portugal with its majestic sandstone cliffs and rocks towering out of the sea and still away back inland. I could discern lofty mountains and tracts of land which bore the appearance of being very barren and lifeless. At the extreme edge of the cape there is a very fine lighthouse built of dazzling white stone.

We passed some large boats today, also some peculiar fish which were probably amusing themselves by leaping from one wave to another in a very funny manner. <sup>1</sup> This is about all the happenings of importance today as most of my time I spent in reading *The Amateur Gentleman*, which like all Jeffery Farnols' yarns is a real good one. I might mention that after two days of scorching sunshine, my face resembles that of an Indian with the addition of copious peeling of the nasal organ which I find has a tendency to make me cross-eyed.

### **March 10<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

At the unearthly hour of four a.m. I was awakened by my chum Jack who informed me that we were passing through the Straits of Gibraltar. I was naturally interested even at such an hour and immediately leaped from my bunk and jumped out of the cabin into the darkness.

Most of the party got up but most were disappointed as nothing but tiny lights could be distinguished dotted along the shore.

I have spent the day reading and playing deck golf. Land is almost imperceptible now but at intervals high mountains make their appearance from out of the clouds on the shores of southern Spain.

### **March 11<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Today has been much cooler and by way of a change a little rain has fallen, this no doubt is due to our course being altered north. About midday we passed the island of Eivissa which is just off the east coast of Spain. It looked very beautiful with its massive rocky shores and so far as was perceptible through my telescope, I should think it was almost uninhabited.

### **March 12<sup>th</sup>, 1921. Saturday, Marseilles.**

We reached Marseilles just before sundown and thus we were not deprived of the finest sight we have yet seen. The natural harbour is truly a most picturesque one surrounded by very high and rocky shores on which some fine buildings were observed. As we drew nearer into the harbour, the famous Notre Dame was observed with its huge golden image glistening in the evening sunset.

By the time the anchor was lowered it was half past seven, however after dinner some of us decided to go ashore in order to stretch our legs. We set off in the direction of the town feeling the while as though we were walking on air. This was undoubtedly due to the motion of the ship.

Now being strangers to this foreign shore we naturally saw lots of strange sights and customs. What struck me most in particular was the extraordinary number of shops used for the purpose of eating and drinking; it was really appalling. The money used here was unusual and really quite funny as all kinds of pieces of paper, cardboard tickets and even postage stamps inserted in tiny aluminium frames with celluloid covers were used.

Time was rather short for us this evening as we had to be back fairly early on the boat so we just walked about and made ourselves generally acquainted with the place. The roads and pavements are long and straight and most of the main thoroughfares have avenues of large shady trees. With regard to the shops, there are few really smart ones although first rate goods can be purchased at them. A great deal could be said about the people as there is such a variety of them but generally speaking the French people themselves are very smartly attired.

### **March 13<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

This morning we made our way to the town as early as possible in order to see as much as we could during our short stay. We boarded a tramcar at short distance from the docks. They are very ramshackle concerns, coupled in pairs and have no top decks; they have first and second class and at intervals during the day the fares fluctuate. After making a few purchases and having a look round the most important places we returned once more to the ship. By this time, dinner was served, and the loading of the boat was still in progress ...

... as it had been all night. Most of the cargo taken on consisted of barrels of Tarragona white wine and crates of wine.

Just before we set sail again a lot of hawkers appeared with field glasses and opera glasses of all designs and varieties. A lot of them were really fine instruments and several of the party were persuaded to buy. Within a few hours of starting, a French woman with two little girls stood alongside the ship playing an accordion, violin, and mandolin. I think they must have had a good harvest as they picked money and played continuously.

Anchor was drawn again at 5:50 p.m. so this time of our departure we had a better view of the harbour as it was almost dark when entering. There seemed to be a great slump in shipping as the docks were congested with vessels of all sorts.

### **March 14<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Having just crawled out, I forgot to mention in yesterday's account that the cargo also included about 60 Africans. They are a long, lean, and hungry looking lot in semi-European attire and a turban. Their faces are almost black, and their eyes have a piercing look while the rest of their features express distrust. They have just assembled for breakfast in a compartment which has been especially rigged up for them in the hold of the ship. On standing on the upper deck, I had a fine view of this procedure. They always seem to eat the same kind of food, namely curry and rice. This they eat out of big bowls or any receptacle they can lay their hands upon. After mixing the contents with their fingers, they pick it up in handfuls and literally push it into their mouths. I must say it was an awful sight to watch them, but indeed a great appetiser for one who felt a little bit off song or seasick.

### **March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

For the most part of today we have been passing by the islands of Sardinia and Corsica. They look very rugged with just a few buildings and lighthouses dotted here and there. Our course is directed a little further south and consequently it is somewhat hotter. We have passed through the straits which divide the extreme south of Italy from Sicily. Stromboli was a magnificent sight which we were fortunate in seeing within about a mile of us. It so happened that it was fairly active, and an unusually large volume of smoke was pouring from its huge crater. The photographers got very busy, and I think the results they obtained ought to be very good although the sun was setting fast. As the ship drew closer, I could see lots of fine white houses at its base and later the flames were distinctly observed leaping out from the top. This was a splendid sight when viewed from my telescope. Tonight, we are in the narrowest part of the Strait of Messina and all the party are grouching now because the sun has set, and we can no longer get a clear vision of the wonderful sights. However, it is a very pretty spectacle by night with thousands of tiny lights all twinkling on the shores. As I looked, I could distinctly follow the course of a train weaving its way between the lights and the shrill whistle was plainly heard as it disappeared into a tunnel.

### **March 16<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Today we are well out on the ocean again and nothing really exciting has happened. Most of my time I have spent reading.

### **March 17<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Father Neptune has been having quite a game with us for the last thirty-six hours in the Mediterranean Sea so much so that most of my time has been confined to my bunk. I have noticed several different kinds of birds flying round the ship including linnets, swallows, greenfinches, seagulls, and a hawk. Later on in the day a pigeon fell on the deck. It seemed as though it was tired out but with the kindly care of one of the passengers it was soon revived and well again. I think this is about all of interest except that I am immersed in reading; 'A Romance of Two Worlds' by the well-known author Marie Corelli.

### **March 18<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

As I gazed from my cabin porthole this morning it was quite obvious that Old Neptune was still very much annoyed about something as the sea was rolling heavily and a strong wind was blowing. By the time I had finished my breakfast, the lower deck was being swept by huge waves. This was indeed a very fine sight to watch but at the same time I was hoping it would not be necessary to take our seats in the lifeboats. As time went on it became somewhat calmer; this no doubt was due to us passing the island of Candia.<sup>2</sup> This was taken advantage by the captain who steered out from his course and drew closer to the shores for protection. Most of the party were quiet today and don't seem to want to talk or do anything much. Yes indeed old Neptune has pulled our legs!!

### **March 21<sup>st</sup>, 1921**

During the night we have passed through the Gulf of Suez and today we are speeding along through the Red Sea. All the crew have donned their white suits and great preparations have taken place for the real hot weather that is to come. I was very pleased on taking a walk round the ship this morning that some sailors were very busy erecting a canvas swimming bath. I hope before many hours have passed to have a plunge into it. For the rest of the day, I have played deck golf and read books.

### **March 25<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

We have seen the last of land again for another week. As we were passing through the Gulf of Aden, I just had a glimpse of Cape Gawz-dami. This is located on the north coast of Somalia in Africa. A few white buildings could just be discerned but vegetation was very scanty and the whole scene presented a lonely and lifeless picture.



### **March 30<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

We have made rather slow progress for the last two or three days covering only two hundred and fifty-three miles in twenty-four hours. This is owing to the strong currents and head wind. Today registered at noon we have done two hundred and eighty-three miles. If this is kept up, we shall arrive at Colombo on time.

### **April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1921**

Everybody on board is almost out of control as we are nearing that much longed for port of Colombo. We had a vivid electric storm in the night and this morning the rain is falling in torrents. The ship conveying the Crown Prince of Japan to England where he will tour the country, passed us at 8 p.m. There was no signal or salutation of any kind except the semaphore signalling lights which occasionally flashed out. We all let go three mighty cheers, but I have my doubts as to whether they were heard.

### **April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1921**

At 6 a.m. I was lying in my bunk as we steamed into Colombo, and I realised now that within an hour the throb of the propellers would cease. Our party had breakfast and after the usual procedures and formalities with passports, we assembled in a little group and boarded a small steam ferryboat.

At 6:15 p.m. we weighed anchor again and with storm clouds gathering all round, I watched that place where I and my friends had enjoyed some of the most vivid experience of the voyage receding out of sight. Within an hour of leaving the bright sunny sky had turned black and rain fell in torrents. I felt rather anxious about the people's lives in what I thought were two tiny rowing boats but on closer observation through my glasses I could see that they were catamarans and no doubt in the hands of dexterous and worthy mariners.

### **April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Today I was up early for the night had been very hot and to sleep was almost impossible. We were now almost through the Bay of Bengal and once more land has loomed up on the horizon. Some two hours have passed, and I find on observing my map that what I see is the most northerly point of the island of Sumatra. Here the land rises abruptly from out the ocean and high up into most magnificent hills and mountains. The tops of many are embraced with mist and clouds and look very beautiful in the dazzling morning sunshine.

### **April 7<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Today we sleep for tomorrow we live. As another week has passed and we shall soon be on shore once again, this time in Singapore.

**7:30 p.m.** Once again, the clatter of plates and dishes has ceased and after a sumptuous repast, I have turned my attention to sorting out some of the lightest apparel I possess. Tomorrow promises to be a veritable furnace taking into account that we shall be but one degree off the equator. I was hoping that through the Malacca Strait we should hug ...

... the coast of the Malay Peninsula, but I was disappointed as all I have seen of land has been mentioned hitherto.

### **April 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

I was awake this morning very early as instinct seemed to tell me that we were nearing land again. Peeping out of my cabin porthole I observed a great way off, lofty steeples and distant domes so I felt sure that this must be Singapore.

The entrance to the port is very picturesque being dotted with tiny islets crowded with palms and dense green foliage. These together with the frail tiny boats and various other craft used by the natives on the beautiful pale green sea impressed me very much.

By **8 o'clock** we were alongside the quay.

As the day was young, we decided to walk to the town, some two miles away and make use of their conveyances when the heat became too overpowering as it did, rising to 94°F [44°C] in the shade. The road was wide and thick with dust, but it was not long before we reached some shops and houses all painted in bright colours but mostly pale blue, presenting a distinctive eastern effect. Most of the upper rooms had shutters fitted to the windows and the whole scene reminded me of pictures I have seen on China and oriental bric-a-brac.

There appears to be more business done in the streets than in the shops, especially edible wares. All along the kerbstones and street corners, hawkers stand and squat about selling their goods, the sight of which would make most English people run but being ignorant of what these concoctions were made of I cannot say if they were good or bad. I did not feel disposed to sampling them.

Most of the third-class passengers that embarked in Singapore consist of several families of Japanese people and when I look out upon them it seems as though I am already in Japan. The laughter of the children is very merry and musical.

During the last twenty-four hours sailing through the China Sea the recorded mileage of 300 miles was obtained. This is the greatest distance as yet covered during this voyage.

### **April 15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> 1921**

A dense clammy fog prevailed as we steamed slowly into the harbour of Hong Kong thus obscuring everything from view save a few ships' lights in our immediate locality. All that I could hear was the constant blast of the fog horns and hooters mixed with the rattle and clanging of cranes and the shouts of the coolies as they worked at loading and unloading the ships on the wharfs.

In the morning, a fine panorama view of the harbour was revealed. The town of Hong Kong is built at the base of a mountainous island and in order to reach it one must take a ferry boat across from the mainland of China. After breakfast I set off with my friend and we were quickly conveyed across in the little steamer. I found that street life in the town was very similar to that of Singapore only everything seemed to be on a better basis. The streets and pavements were wider and kept very clean, that is in regard to the European quarter.

On rising the next morning, I learned that the ship would not sail until noon. This was good news for there was plenty more for us to see on that little island. Having had breakfast, we boarded the little steamer again. I felt like a Sunday school teacher on a treat day as the boat was crowded with lots of little children on their way to school. This time we paid a visit to the botanic gardens and found them very beautiful. The air was laden with the fragrant scent of the flowers and the magnificent bird like butterflies with their bright glowing colours, flitted about in profusion. The trees were also very fine especially the palms, the trunks of which were long and straight, evenly spaced with narrow rings of bark to the top and terminating with a tuft of enormous leaves resembling a giant sunshade.

Banyan trees were also in large numbers. They have branches of enormous length which support themselves by sending down smaller branches or roots into the ground. These not only support but also feed the tree causing it to spread to vast proportions. There was no time for further discoveries so meeting our party strolling through the gardens we decided to finally return to the ship with them.

During the time we were absent about eight hundred tons of cargo had been unloaded which chiefly consisted of steel bars and other raw materials. Everything was packed up and ready to make another start punctual to time although we are a day late. After about two hours sailing Hong Kong was lost to view and the only suggestion of us having been in the vicinity of China was the hundreds of little junk boats, some merrily sailing along while others were busily engaged in fishing.

#### **April 17<sup>th</sup>, 1921. Sunday.**

Today we are passing on our way through the Straits of Formosa. This is located between the China coast and the island of Formosa<sup>3</sup>. Later we shall be in the East China Sea and but a few hundred miles from Shanghai.

#### **April 18<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Last night we encountered a veritable deluge of rain. It commenced with huge drops about the size of a tumbler full. Then the windows of heaven were unbarred and the waters that are above the firmament fell as lakes. The ship seemed suddenly transformed into a submarine for it was forging its way through a dense volume of water as it were several fathoms under the sea.

#### **April 20<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

At 12:30 p.m. yesterday the pilot boat drew up alongside of us. We had about sixty miles to go to reach Shanghai, most of which was up the river Yangtze. The scenery was very interesting especially where the banks were closer, and objects were more easily observed. The vegetation was all of a light green hue and quite unlike that seen in other parts of the world. The town and country are very flat and as we only had a few hours on shore we could only take a brief interest in the place.



*Nanking Road  
Shanghai  
circa 1921*

At 3 p.m. the little tugboats got busy again to turn our ship around in the river and we were soon on our way back to the open sea again. This I might call the last lap of the big sea as very shortly we shall be sailing through the beautiful inland Sea of Japan.

#### **April 21<sup>st</sup>, 1921**

Today we have been completely isolated from the world owing to the dense fog that prevails. In the evening it abated, and the result was a glorious moon light night with the air cool and fresh and the light beams glittering on the calm water like burnished steel.

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### **Our Arrival in Japan and the following weeks**

#### **April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1921**

Early this morning the appearance of fishing boats and the birds of all kinds that flew round and about the ship reminded me that we were nearing land once again. At 3 p.m. we had the first glimpse of Japan. One hour later we were well into the Sea of Japan with its ever-changing series of pictures. The quiet wooded shores, with many a group of houses nestling in some fairy like glen by this slumbering sea tempts one to sail up every opening and to scramble up the numerous gaps. There is a fine profusion and variety in the shapes of the hills. Some are curiously symmetrical, others as curiously grotesque while many of the islets have distorted trees of unusual growth.

### **April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1921**

As the Sea of Japan is some two hundred miles in length, we have been travelling through it all night. Waking up at 4 a.m., I could hear the ship's rudder working furiously as she weaved her way through the innumerable islands and rocks.

### **April 24<sup>th</sup>, 1921. Sunday.**

I was very glad to have the good fortune to see the city of Kobe by night. It is an enormous place and characteristically Japanese. So far in my estimation I think it surpasses nearly all that I have seen at our previous ports of call, the beauty of which is greatly aided by the many bright glowing colours that all the shops display. The kimonos worn by the Japanese women and children looked very pretty and attractive. The clatter of the little wooded sandals as they walked about sounded weird yet fascinatingly musical.

When we got back to the ship our chief informed us that we were to be ready to catch a train early the next morning as a telegram had been received from Mr Short to that effect so I, like the others had a very busy evening packing up my goods and chattels while the rain was pouring down in torrents.

### **April 25<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Our final breakfast was finished, and everybody was bustling round and falling over one another as the time was very near for our departure from the good ship. After many salaams and farewells to our jolly little stewards, we climbed into the motor cars which were waiting for us on the quay and in turn we were quickly taken to the station. After a brief interval we were in an express train and on our last stage of the great journey. As this took us just twelve hours we were served with lunch, tea and dinner in the dining saloon which adjoined our carriage.

Famous Mount Fuji loomed up into sight when we were nearing Yokohama. The top was rendered invisible by heavy black clouds. On our arrival at Yokohama station, we were met by the proprietor of the hotel and other gentlemen of fine repute. After a brief conversation they told us that another forty-minute train journey would see us at our new home. In a short time, we were brought to the Kaihin Hotel; a fine building in fact the best residence in Kamakura and situated in one of the three finest beauty spots of Japan.

### **April 26<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Now that our journey is ended, we are waiting to start business and I understand that it will be some time before we get going as things move pretty slowly over here and we are awaiting the arrival of the materials etc. from which we are to build the flying boats. They will be here shortly on the next boat from England. I am not worrying about making a start just yet as a holiday on good old terra firma will come as a nice change after the long weeks of floating on Neptune's bath.

### **April 27<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

The Japanese Naval authorities have organised weekend tours for our party about Japan and today we went on the first one. Leaving Kamakura by an early express to Tokyo we were met by Commander Horii and several officers who acted as guides. There was a fleet of six private motor cars waiting for us at the station on our arrival.

After lunch we were given a good drive around in the cars, returning to Tokyo station for tea. We all experienced a very fine day's outing and after bidding our worthy guides sayonara, we caught a train back to the hotel in good time for dinner.

### **April 30<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Today we caught the early train again to Tokyo and met as before, having a similar day to yesterday.

### **May 6<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

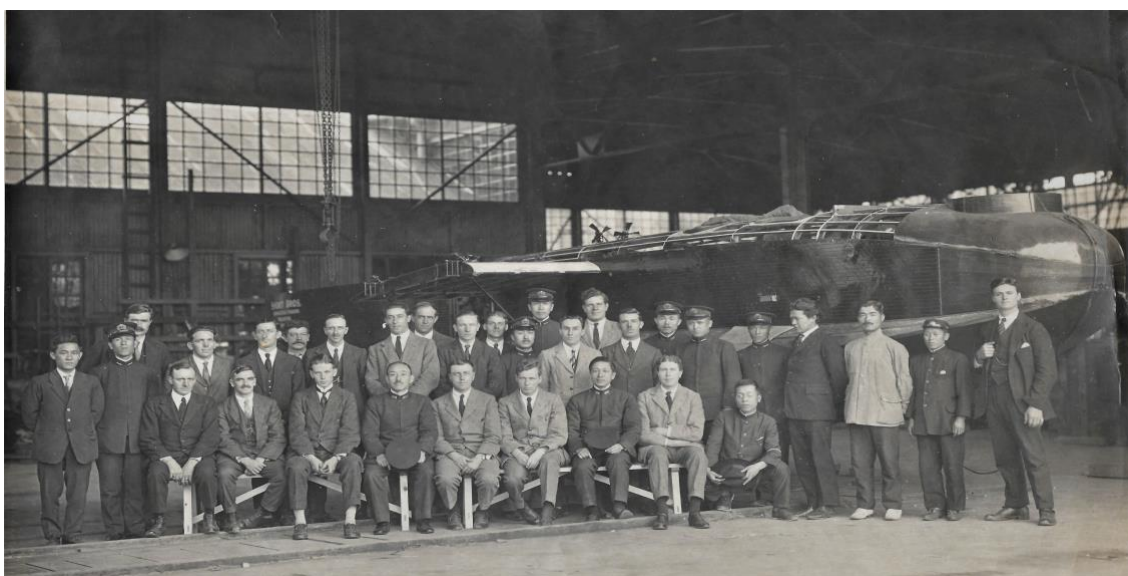
Rain has fallen incessantly so I have spent my time writing letters.

### **May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Still raining hard. Still writing hard.

### **May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Paid a visit to Taura and the dockyard. After watching the unloading of the first flying boat from England our party was shown round the various workshops which were very interesting although some of their methods appeared very crude to us. We were provided with a hot lunch sent from the hotel and afterwards had our photographs taken together with officers from the Japanese Navy using the flying boat as a background.



*First flying boat from England, Shorts team,  
senior works staff and Japanese Navy officers. Les is far right.*

**May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

This morning my chief informed me that I might extend my holiday until further notice as it will be some time before things are in working order at our works. At present all the stores and materials are packed in cases as they have been delayed in their transit from England.

**May 15<sup>th</sup>, 1921, Sunday.**

Many visitors arrived again today from local towns including the British Ambassador from Tokyo. All the nesans were dressed in their best kimonos and sashes or obies as they are called in Japanese.

**May 17<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

I have spent the morning and part of the afternoon writing letters home and to my colleagues at the works in England.

**May 26<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Photographs of our departure from England arrived here this morning. They are postcard size and were taken in a little series as follows:

Number one is where we are just leaving the Rochester works in a motor charabanc.

Number two depicts the friends who came to see us off, standing on the ferry boat talking to those on board just before weighing anchor. Number three shows us in a group just as we embarked at Tilbury.

**May 30<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Just five weeks today we arrived in Japan and since then I have had one continuous holiday but today, I made use of my season ticket and had a look round the dockyard at Taura where our flying boat works are situated.

Progress seems very slow, in fact the large sheds and workshops in which we are to build the machines are not yet completed. We have also been delayed a good deal owing to the drawings and blueprints not having been sent from England. Now that they have arrived it is highly probable that we shall be at work in earnest before long, at least I think this year.

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## The start of flying boat construction

### **June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1921**

What a glorious day to commence work upon. Yes, I really made a start today after six weeks holiday. I arrived at the works at 9.30 a.m. and was duly introduced to those with whom I shall be most intimate for the rest of my stay in Japan. The introductions took up the rest of the morning in a special office set aside for the purpose.

Of course, an interpreter was necessary and having mobilised all the men who will be in my charge they took their seats like a class of schoolboys would in front of a large blackboard. My interpreter who will be with me all the time then proceeded to introduce me by writing my name upon the board in English and Japanese. Several other remarks were also chalked down and after that Commander Hori introduced the chagemen and workmen to me. This was followed by much handshaking and bowing and thus ended the ceremony.

In the afternoon I was asked to lecture to the men on the various tools and contrivances used in the various branches of the engineering trade. All conversation is done through the medium of an interpreter which of course becomes most amusing at times. Later I had a very good lunch but should have enjoyed it much better if the Japanese boy waiters had not served up the sweet with the last (previous) course.

During the afternoon I was shown some of the workmen's methods of doing their work and I found that there is plenty of scope for improvement and reconstruction in this respect before we are finished here. I returned at 4 p.m. arriving back at the hotel for tea after having experienced a most unusual day.

### **June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1921. At the works, Taura.**

Having little work to do just for the present I will give here a general impression of the everyday routine. In the first instance we rise and have breakfast then catch the 8:35 from Kamakura arriving at the works at 9:30. The employees have a ten-minute break from 9:30 to 9:40 so we do not make a start until they do so again. Meanwhile the boy sans, who are always in attendance make us tea and we sit round the table talking and learning Japanese. This being a government factory of course privileges the men to always take their time and never to hurry under any circumstances, so the ten minutes break is usually extended to over half an hour. Then we all hustle on until noon when we have an hour for lunch, then on again until 3 o'clock for another ten-minute break which is extended like the one in the morning. The men continue working until four o'clock, but we are finished after our 3 o'clock tea as it's too late to start again; besides, the men don't reckon to do anything after 3:30 as it takes half an hour to have a wash. On getting back to the hotel at 5:30 p.m. the nesans have tea and toast ready for us. Then we dine again at 7:30 p.m. and so ends a day's work.



### **June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Saturday morning work was soon over as I started at ten and was away from the works at eleven thirty. In the afternoon I wrote letters and went for a walk.

### **June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Things have gone very smoothly today at the works, and I feel that I am settling down to business once again. I had a delightful swim with my chum this evening and afterwards we posed for the camera in our kimonos which we always use when going bathing.

### **June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Today has been very warm and to aid matters I have also had a warm job instructing the men in the art of lead pouring, in the filling of copper tubes with molten lead in order that they can be bent to various shapes. Rather an amusing incident occurred when I asked the head of the department for a small notebook suitable for making a few rough sketches in. He told me he had none but would get one made to my requirements on the premises. His instructions must have been quickly carried out for the later in the afternoon a truly splendid book was handed to me, very nicely bound.

### **June 8<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

The works manager showed me the tool and instrument box which he has had made for me in the pattern makers shop to replace the one I had which got badly damaged on the voyage. I think this one is far superior to the original and to put the finishing touch on to it they have painted my name in English and Japanese.

### **June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Another day of almost ceaseless explaining twixt interpreter and workmen has passed. The latter are certainly beginning to "find their feet" although it takes about ten times as long to get work done here as it does in England.

We started on our new hours today and now catch the 7:38 train in the morning which takes us to the scene of our labours in time to make a start at 8 o'clock. We leave again at 3.45 p.m. so we are back again at the hotel for tea and a nice long evening.

### **June 11<sup>th</sup>, 1921. Sunday.**

This morning, business as usual. I have spent the morning preparing letters for the mail to England.

### **June 13<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Today has passed without a hitch and this evening, on my way home, I had the pleasure of meeting Mr Hirayama the chief submarine engineer of Yokosuka dock yard. He speaks really good English, and I was introduced to his wife at this hotel on the occasion of a Sunday afternoon tea dance.

### **June 14<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

On leaving the hotel for business this morning the rain was pelting down in torrents, and I finally arrived at the works looking like a shipwrecked corpse. After I had been there a few hours the fire alarm was raised. There was instantly great confusion and all the work people rushed out of the shops to the scene which I myself happened to be close to. The cause of the fire was the ignition of a large bath of petrol in which a number of aeroplane engine parts were being cleaned. What actually caused the fire was the accidental rotating of a magneto electric generator thus causing an electric spark. What might have been a very serious affair, as the building was constructed of wood almost entirely, while overhead were offices in which valuable papers and drawings were kept. For a moment I thought the leaping flames would devour the lot, but they were soon frustrated by the many willing hands. The people on the floor upstairs were terrified and ran down bringing their desks, papers and things of any value with them. The conversation of the employees during the climax of the fire had, I am sure, no comparison to the confusion of tongues during the building of the tower of Babel.

### **June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

On arriving at the works this morning my first man greeted me with the usual bow and hat raising performance then ceremoniously presented me with a packet of picture post cards depicting cherry blossom time in Tokyo and others of Japan's prettiest geisha girls.



*Cherry blossom, Ueno Park, Tokyo*

### **June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Instead of the usual steamer meeting us after business tonight we were escorted through the harbour on a very powerful motor launch. Her engines were 750 horse power and she was capable of a speed of forty knots. This was by far the fastest watercraft I have ever travelled upon.

### **June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Everything has gone on well today, but I was disappointed not to receive my usual weekly letters from home on my arrival at the works. I had a splendid view of Mt Fuji as I was returning in the train. It seemed as if the clouds opened especially to show me the beauty of the famous mountain with its summit covered with pure white snow which appeared almost impossible as the thermometer in the railway carriage registered 83° F. The wet season is now at its climax and rain falls in sheets.

### **June 18<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

As soon as I arrived at the works this morning, I was asked by the chief of my flock to tell them all about my tools and instruments which I had brought with me from England. I had them all labelled; one, two, three, four, five, six etc and the same numbers put into a book with the name of each tool alongside. A lot of the collection I brought are quite new to them and when I had explained, with the aid of an interpreter, the uses, and methods of employing them they were amazed. The chief made the flattering remark to the interpreter that he thought I knew everything.



*A Chesterman's Vernier Calliper Gauge which belonged to Les Buckett and was used to check the dimensions of pieces being manufactured.*

**June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

We have had rain for the duration of the weekend, and I have hardly put my nose outside the door. Writing and reading has been my chief occupation. My present book is a very interesting one about China by Prof. Douglas.

**June 20<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Things have gone well again at the works today and many little amusing incidences have occurred. It is almost 10 p.m. and as I sit writing at my table with a bright electric light beaming out, the mosquitoes are flying round me in profusion.

**June 21<sup>st</sup>, 1921**

Yes, that was rain sure enough and the Japanese people seemed very pleased about it as it was thought that the wet season would be a failure this year. Personally, I was not overjoyed about it as I tramped my way to the station which is some twenty minutes' walk. As I stood waiting for the train, the rain appeared to be surging from the hills which encircle the station and looked like huge filmy apparitions coming towards me.

**June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1921**

Have had a very busy day lecturing and explaining to officers and men on the top of one of our flying boats. These lectures provided a great deal of amusement to me as well as work, for the men are continually sketching and making notes of different parts while some of the questions they put to me by the aid of an interpreter are too funny for words. However I am glad to note that the men show a very fair amount of intelligence in their work and in the course of time I think it will be fairly easy to get them to do precisely what we want them to and by the help of God and the combined efforts of the studious work people, someday I can foresee many flying boats and sea planes flitting round the shores of Japan.

**June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Saturday round once more and I have just returned from business and had my lunch.

**June 26<sup>th</sup>, 1921. Sunday.**

Now as so much of my time is taken up by my duties at the works, thus the interesting daily topics so greatly curtailed, I feel compelled to keep a record of each week's events only. If I kept an account of my everyday experiences, they would make very dry and uninteresting reading and I should often have to use the word ditto on the pages of this diary.

**July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1921. Sunday.**

On waking up this morning I could hear the incessant rain which has been falling all this week, pattering on the roof of my little Japanese house. I am very glad that the wet season is almost over.

### **July 9<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

This week has passed rather uneventful as the ordinary everyday affairs have been my lot. We are experiencing some warm weather now and it is predicted that a very hot summer is in store for us, and already extensive preparations have been made in accordance.

### **July 30<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Yesterday was pay day again at the works and all the employees had their usual half day holiday. I also commenced an extended weekend as I have today, Sunday and Monday which is August bank holiday and of course must be recognised for the sake of Old England.

### **August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

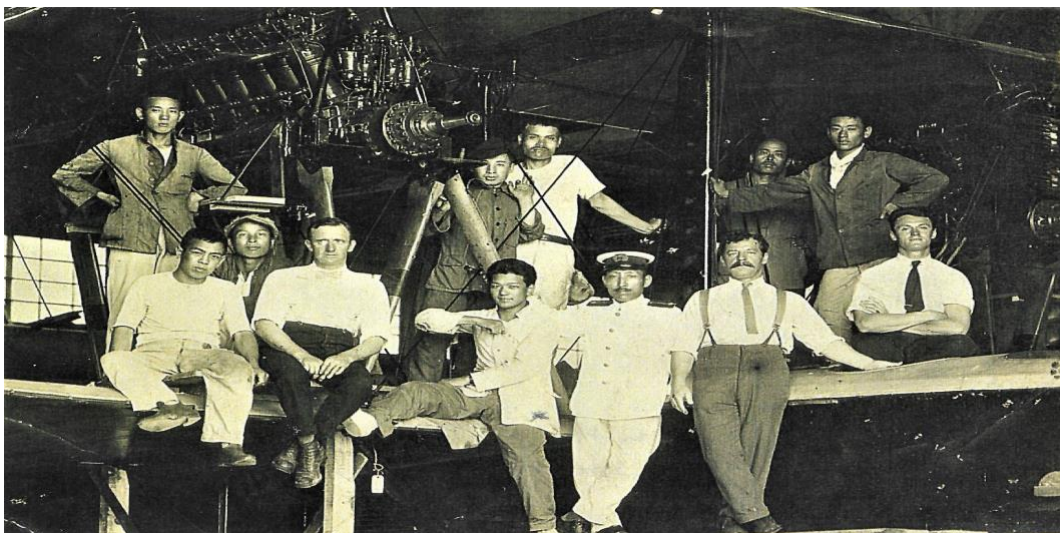
Here's another weekend very soon round again. That always seems to me the worst of being so busy as weeks, months, and years fleet past very quickly and makes one's life feel shorter than what this mere flash of an existence really is.

Last week Mr Short left here to return to England. He is travelling via America in a first-class ship in the Blue Funnel Line. Mr Parker our flying boat [test] pilot arrived here a few days ago. It is his mission to instruct the Japanese pilots in the art of handling them. He told us that he had a very pleasant journey out here and experienced a superbly calm sea and fine weather for the duration of the voyage.

### **August 13<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

This week the sun has shone forth overwhelmingly powerful as now we are well into the month of August, Japan's hottest month. While travelling in the train to Taura, just after eight o'clock in the morning the thermometer was registering 92° F.

I have had another week at the aerodrome and our first machine is now complete and awaiting the necessary tests before taking to the water and her wings. This is the largest type of machine the Japanese people have in their country so I have not the least doubt that there will be some excitement when she flies over Tokyo and Yokohama.



*The first flying boat nearing completion. Les is on the far right.*

## **Return to work and other pastimes.**

### **September 4<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Three important events have taken place this week, the first being in the form of a friendly swimming match from Zushi to Kamakura.

The next event was when I tried my hand at flying, and this took place at the aerodrome on Friday last when Lieutenant Arcashi took me up in a seaplane. This was my first experience of flying and I thoroughly enjoyed every moment of the trip. We went up very high so that the view of the sea and rugged coastline was a wonderful sight; the ships and various buildings appearing as mere specks on an enormous map.

The third and last event was the homecoming of Japan's Prince who recently visited England and other countries. Unfortunately, I was at business during the day so I saw little of what took place but I have since learned that all Japan was jubilant and turned out to give him a hearty welcome. Then came the grand final in the form of a shower of fireworks which marked the end of a great day for most of the people of Japan.

### **September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

My friend and I decided to visit Tokyo today so as soon as breakfast was over, we caught an early train which landed us in the big city at half past ten. Neither of us knew our way about the place very well but by instinct we seemed to hit right on the places we wanted and that was the main store and shopping quarter.



*Badasaki Gate Street Tokyo circa 1920*

### **September 18<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

This month will always be known for its rough weather and during the last week has made itself badly felt in many parts of the country. The severe storm which swept northern Japan on Sunday and Monday morning has caused considerable damage between Osaka and Shizuoka.

Work is still progressing favourably at the dockyard and there are many hulls laid down for the flying boats which will be completed next year.

### **September 25<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Today the weather has been exceptionally fine and soon after breakfast I went by train to Zushi, that is the next town to this along the seashore and there I met a Japanese friend of mine who is employed at the Oehama aerodrome.

Early one morning we had a somewhat violent earthquake shock but really I am disappointed with them as they are not nearly as exciting; (as it were, so to speak) as an air raid. On the occasion of this one however, it woke me up just in time to hear the woodwork creaking and groaning a little.

### **October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1921**

This is Sunday night and still the rain pours down in torrents while the wind blows with great force. A report has come from Tokyo that the signs are out for an expected typhoon. Nobody can make out what has become of the weather for never before have they experienced so much rain at one time. During the last forty-nine days, forty have been wet.

### **October 12<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

At last, the rain has come to an end, at least I think and hope so or there will be great disaster in many parts of Japan. Further damage and suffering is chronicled in my newspaper this morning owing to the terrific wind and rain.

### **October 18<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

This is Monday and a National Holiday for today is kind of a second commemoration or appendix to the recent harvest festival and a great time of rejoicing for the emperor, his household and Japan. Last Monday I commenced my weeks' vacation and strange to say the weather since then has been exceptionally fine and has compelled me to fetch out my white summer suits once again, which I thought I had put away for the season.

### **October 29<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

For some weeks past our party have been expecting to hear of the time for our return to England and today while at lunch the news was broken to us and this is what it is anticipated will happen. Owing to our duties at the dockyard works and aerodrome expiring at different periods we shall return in two groups.

The first one is to leave here on January 6<sup>th</sup>. I myself will be with this group and the boat selected is the Mishima Maru which is of the 7,500-ton class so that she is a much larger ship than the Iyo Maru which brought us here and I understand more up to date. The second group is to sail sometime in April, but at the present time of writing their ship has not been chosen. Having learned that our ship will call at all ports, I am in expectation that my return voyage will be a very memorable one. Further to break the actual sailing for such a length of time it has been proposed that we leave the ship at Singapore and travel by rail to Penang and resume our passage from there. Then again, we might travel across France from Marseilles, staying a day in Paris thus making the whole trip much more interesting, then meeting the ship again. I shall very soon find myself in England and in good time to welcome the spring, in all its beauty, which will be very near by that time.

### **November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1921**

Yesterday was a national holiday so two of my friends and myself extended our rambles. Starting soon after breakfast we took the tram as before to Fujisawa. The weather was grand and the sky serenely blue bearing a resemblance to a huge, inverted bowl.

### **November 15<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Arrangements were made during the week for a party of mechanics and machinists from the works and me to have our photographs taken in a group. The place selected for the operation was the base of the Hachiman shrine, Kamakura, that being a favourite spot amongst local people. On this occasion it served admirably for the large number which turned up all dressed up in their best Sunday kimonos and trilby hats tilted at various angles; perhaps pleasing to them but to my idea, wholly unsuited and most unbecoming to the rest of dress. However, the photograph was taken and I, accompanied with my friends was asked to take refreshments at a tea house close by. The time then was dinner time for the Japanese party as they all set to and ate the box lunches which they had brought with them using their chop sticks in the customary way.



*The Works Team*



*Wing construction*



### **November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1921**

My friend and I have had a fine walk this afternoon and the country everywhere is looking very fine with the beautiful changing colours of the leaves and the silver birch trees which are now shedding their bark and stand out in splendid contrast to the evergreen foliage which so profusely covers many of the hills. This week has been a very busy one for me, having had two occupations to look after: one at the works and the other at the aerodrome where we have two more machines almost completed.

One will be ready for a trial flight on Monday.

Last Wednesday 2500 visitors came to the aerodrome and on enquiring from an officer as to who they were, he told me that they were the relations of the new sailors who had just recently come up for service under the conscription act which prevails in this country. Part of their time would be served at this flying station.

On another occasion last week the youngest Japanese prince aged six years, came to have a look round and on our way back to lunch in the little steamer we heard the guns firing all round the harbour. Japan's largest dreadnought was responding about half a mile away from us using her largest guns with a terrific roar in salutation to HJH.

### **November 29<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Our second flying boat was equally as successful as the first one when on her trials a few days ago, but a Japanese pilot who was being taught how to fly it made three successive bad landings upon the water and on the fourth attempt he let it come down with such a bump that it pushed one of the wingtip floats right up into the lower plane. Since then, a new plane has been fitted and once again she is airworthy for further attempts.

### **December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Another week gone and I am starting to count the days until my departure. Xmas is fast approaching, and I think there is a very good time and a very memorable time in store for me, as already I have received several invitations to farewell parties, dinners etc. which so many of my friends have kindly arranged in my honour.

### **December 13<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Yesterday the men at the works asked me what I would like as a token of their appreciation for my instructions to them and on the occasion of my departure. I pointed out to them that I had only performed my duty, which further had given me great pleasure to do, and that I was satisfied with their cooperation and concentration upon the task, which I learned has well pleased the Japanese Government and made our combined efforts a great success. Therefore, I felt that I had already been rewarded by their actions and kindnesses bestowed upon me, but nothing would persuade them to abandon the idea of presenting me with a little gift which I felt compelled to leave the choice to their own selection.

### **December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Today marks the ending of my duties at the works as instructor. I am sorry that it is the case for I have become very popular amongst all and a more courteous, thoughtful, happy and good-natured set of fellows I don't suppose I shall ever meet. Just before returning here today, they presented me with a splendid curio which they had formerly promised me. It is a large wood carving of an old Japanese man; its origin or of its history I know not but am endeavouring to find out and hope to be successful before my departure from the country. After the presentation it was packed in an artistically made wooden box on the lid of which was written in Japanese characters the names of all who had contributed to this handsome gift.

### **December 27<sup>th</sup>, 1921**

Once again Christmas and the time of rejoicing has appeared and vanished but as I reflect my mind back on to the happy times I have passed through during this holiday, I cannot help thinking that it has been one of the most radiant and merry times I have experienced for many Christmases.

We all spent a delightful Christmas day and were given such a fine dinner by Mr Varty the hotel manager. In the evening I received an invitation from Baroness Kubota to a ball held at Yokohama in the Grand Oriental Palace Hotel. We all had a fine time but I did not stay until the finish which was at 3:00 a.m.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> a concert and dance was held at this hotel, given by members of the British commission party from Kasumigaura.

All our party were invited by Admiral Funakoshi and his staff to a Japanese dinner party in honour of our departure. The place selected was in Yokosuka to which we were driven in motorcars.

### **January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1922**

At this time last year, I had not the slightest notion that I should enter into a new year in Japan but such has been my happy fate and as I write the echoes and visions of rejoicing and jubilation throughout the land review themselves before my memory.

The time for my departure draws very near now and I am sure I shall be very sorry when the time arrives for me to say Sayonara once and for all to all and to see this beautiful land recede from my sight in the distance as the ship slowly glides away from the quayside and cheers and shouts of Banzai from my friends and happy people gradually become inaudible. My home for the next two months leaves Yokohama docks at ten o'clock tomorrow morning. Then, as I said when I left England; "Today I start on a new life". That I must repeat when the last filmy shadows of fair Nippon are lost to me for ever. Yes, as others have done, I too wonder what is in store for me.

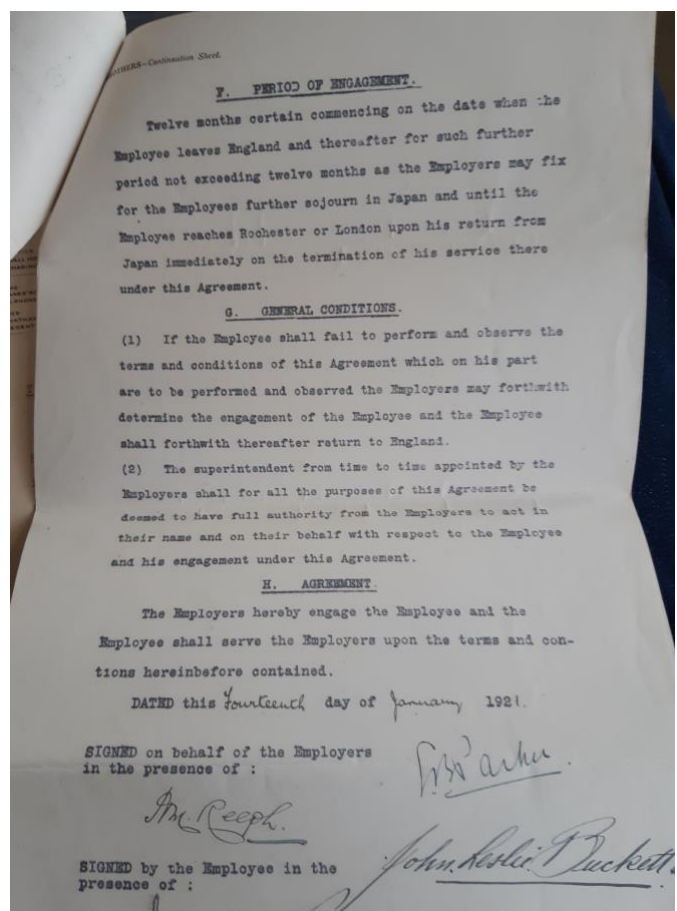
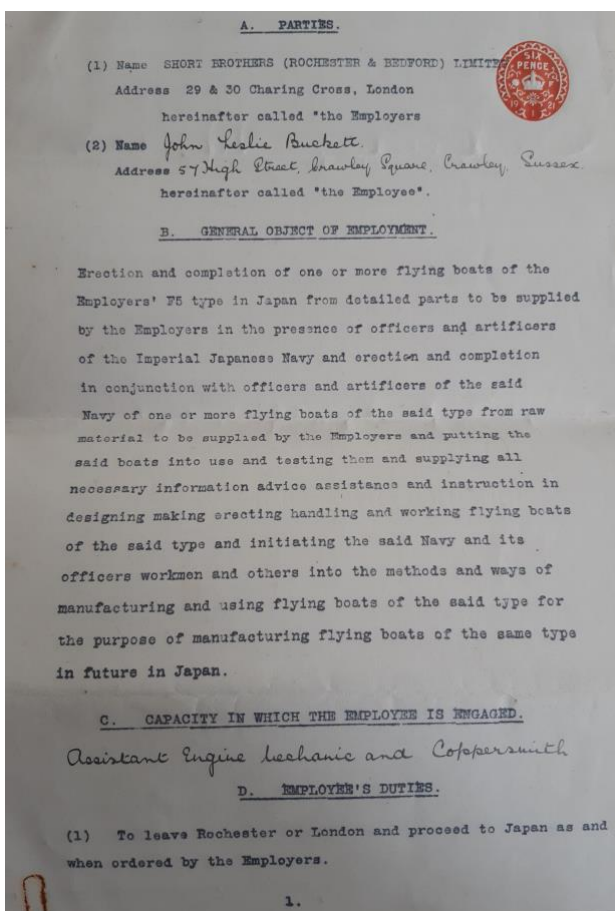
January 10<sup>th</sup>, 1922

Three far sounding whistles had been given, the decks had been cleared of visitors, the mail bags had been stowed away in the hold, the gangway had been hoisted, the anchor had been raised and the Nippon Yusen Kaisha's steamer Mishima Mara stood out to sea.

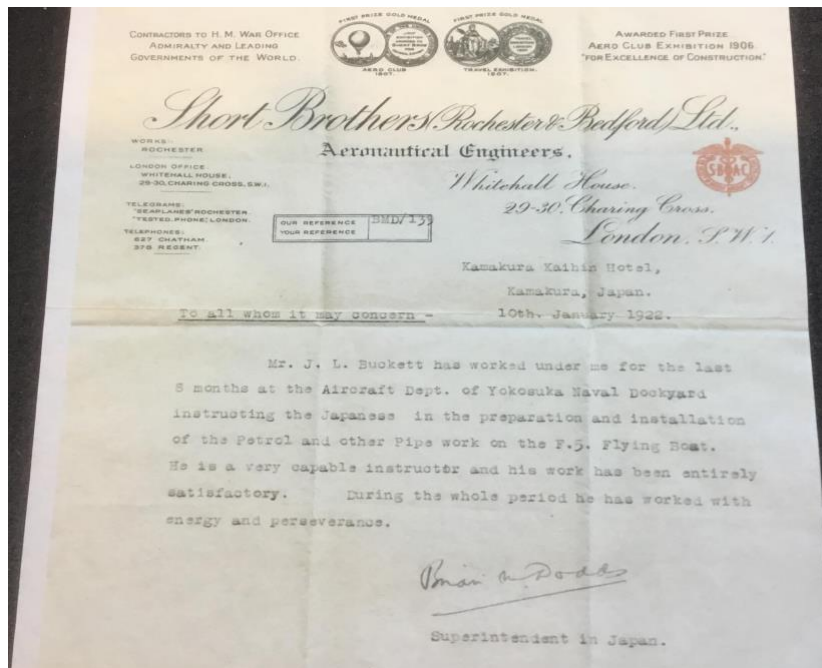
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## Documents

The original contract of employment signed by Les, not long before he travelled with the team to Japan, in 1921.



Contract of employment in Japan. 14<sup>th</sup> January 1921.



From Brian Dodds, Superintendent in Japan, to Les just prior to his departure from Japan.

## Earthquakes

Les mentions three minor earthquakes which occurred during his eight months in Japan, and he was told about earlier events.

On 1<sup>st</sup> September 1923 there was a huge 7.9 magnitude earthquake in the Tokyo-Yokohama area which caused an estimated death toll of around 140,000. It was called the Great Kanto Earthquake.

The quakes were followed by firestorms which added to the devastation and death toll. There were also quakes on the same and succeeding days in other areas.

Les was greatly saddened by this as you might expect as he lost so many good friends.



# SAYONARA