

THE BRITISH IN THE NORTH OF PORTUGAL IN THE 18TH CENTURY, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE PORT FACTORY AND ITS ROLE IN THE SOCIAL AND COMMERCIAL LIFE OF OPORTO, AND AN ASSESSMENT OF THE INFLUENCE OF JOHN WHITEHEAD ON THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE CITY.

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The celebrations held this year to mark the six hundredth anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Windsor have been of great significance in the context of the alliance between Portugal and Great Britain, as they have provided ample proof of the value that each country still places on the alliance, at a time when bilateral treaties have become a rarity and wider alliances such as EEC and NATO have taken their place.

The earliest Treaties, those of 1373 and 1386, were in fact of an entirely political nature, designed to give support to Portugal against Spain, in particular military and naval assistance, at a time when England also was anxious to curb Spanish territorial and political ambitions.

However, to assess when and to what extent the British presence and influence in the North of Portugal became of any importance, it is necessary to move forward nearly three hundred years to the Treaty of 1654 between Cromwell and King D. João IV, as this marked the beginning of the commercial and religious privileges granted to the British in Portugal and coincided with the arrival of their first permanent communities in the North, at Viana do Castelo and then at Oporto. There is little evidence to show that a significant British presence existed before then, and this was confirmed by John Croft in his "Treatise on the Wines of Portugal" 1788, in which he stated his belief that the British did not settle in Portugal until after the Treaty of 1654. So it is safe to assume that the first community at Viana do Castelo started at about that time.¹⁾

The merchants, who had their houses there and also at Mon-

ção and Melgaço by the River Minho, were engaged in the export of wine to England and the import of dried codfish, which originated in Newfoundland, as well as British cotton and woollen goods.

There was a British Consul at Viana at least until 1704 when one writer mentioned him and also a Clergyman, who was certainly unofficial, as there was no British Chaplain at Oporto at that date, and evidently of a sporting character, as it was recorded that "after dinner some Portugal cockerels did engage in battle Ye minister directing". Coopers were brought from England, described as a drunken lot "but ye natives now know how to make casks".²⁾

The wines, usually described as "Red Portugal", were of low alcoholic strength, fortified with sufficient brandy to enable them to stand the voyage and arrive in a drinkable condition, and it was their poor quality that eventually resulted in the merchants moving further south to the Alto Douro in search of wines that more resembled those from France, particularly Burgundy, that the customers in England demanded. It is interesting to note that now, three hundred years later, Vinho Verde in the white variety is being exported to England and other markets and is becoming quite popular.

There followed a greater concentration of British merchants in Oporto and the gradual expansion of the Factory, the collective term describing the merchants or Factors, which had its origins in the Feitorias established by the Portuguese discoverers in Africa and India in the 15th and 16th centuries. The earliest Feitoria was established c.1443 at Arguim in what is now Mauretania.

The British Factories were in existence in Portugal in the middle of the 17th century and that at Oporto was first mentioned in Foreign Office records in 1666.

The first British Protestant Chaplain to the Factory came to Oporto in 1671, but in spite of the religious privileges granted by the 1654 Treaty in practice the early Chaplains were subjected to considerable persecution by the Inquisition and two were actually expelled.

One of these was Dr Samuel Barton, who subsequently became Chaplain to the Speaker of the House of Commons. He wrote a long report to the Bishop of London on his return to England, describing

the circumstances of his expulsion in 1683. He complained bitterly of the refusal by the Inquisition to allow him to sail from Lisbon instead of Oporto, as he had feared that the small ships from the River Douro were more likely to be attacked by pirates, who were very active off the Portuguese coast at that time.

The Methuen Treaty of 1703 has often been quoted as resulting in an immediate increase in the shipments of wine from Oporto, but in fact it was not until about 20 years later that this really began to take place and in 1721 the merchants introduced their own regulations for the better organization of the Factory coinciding with the introduction of the Contribution Fund created by British Act of Parliament in 1721. This Fund was a form of tax levied on all imports from Great Britain in British ships which was used to pay the Chaplain and "for the relief of shipwrecked mariners and other distressed persons, His Majesty's Subjects, and to such other pious, charitable and public uses as shall from time to time be appointed by the majority of the British merchants & factors". It was also used to pay the purchase price of the land destined for the British Cemetery in Oporto in 1787. Prior to then, there was an unofficial burial ground on the south bank of the River Douro, but no grave-stones were permitted.

The merchants had their offices and in many cases their private houses in and around Rua Nova dos Ingleses which was then in the centre of the business and residential area of Oporto and it was there that the architecture of the city was to undergo a change of style following the arrival of John Whitehead as British Consul in 1756.

Little is known of his early life except that he was born in 1726 at Ashton-under-Lyne in Lancashire, but from his subsequent career it would seem that he must have had some training as an architect and in mathematics. The circumstances of his appointment will be related later.

Whitehead's arrival coincided with the formation by the Marquis of Pombal of a wine company with the title Cia Geral da Agricultura das Vinhas do Alto Douro, whose main aim was to break the British monopoly of the finest wines in the Douro district. The shippers, while not actually providing a pretext for the formation

of the Company, had certainly hastened its establishment by their high handed behaviour towards the farmers and their refusal in 1755 to buy any wines even at low prices. The farmers sent a delegation to Oporto but to no avail and then representatives to Lisbon to present their grievances. The Factory protested at what they described as an infringement of their privileges under the Treaties, to which Pombal replied that he had never heard of any British Factory except one "on the coast of Coromandell". This was a reference to the East India Company Factory at Madras established in 1640.

In an effort to reduce the tension and to subdue the opponents of the Company, i.e. the British shippers, Pombal appointed his cousin João de Almada to be Governor of Oporto in 1757 with a special mission to try and bring this about.

Whitehead, in his capacity as Consul, was also ex-officio Chairman of the Factory and therefore closely involved with the shippers and probably sympathetic towards their cause, and it is therefore remarkable that he seems to have established an excellent relationship with Almada, who was also acting as Minister of works in charge of town planning. It says much for Whitehead's diplomatic ability.

Almada had plans for transforming the area around the Praça da Ribeira in Oporto, facing the River Douro, and in the new street of S.João, to be on the lines of the imposing Praça do Comércio in Lisbon in Pombaline style. Whitehead however had other ideas and in 1774 he produced plans, some of which are preserved in the Oporto Municipal archives at Casa do Infante, for the rebuilding of the Praça da Ribeira in Palladian style, an entirely new concept at that time in Portugal where the Baroque had until then been universal. Whitehead was in fact reverting to a style of architecture which had been re-introduced in England by Lord Burlington about half a century earlier, but which was by now losing favour there.

His plans were accepted and some of the houses built to his design still exist.

He next turned his attention to planning what was to be his most ambitious work and his lasting memorial, namely the construction of the Factory House, at the corner of Rua Nova dos Ingleses and Rua S.João, which was completed in 1790.

It became the centre of social life in Oporto and frequent dinners and Balls were held there throughout the 19th century, to which the local authorities and important visitors were invited, including on several occasions members of the Portuguese royal family. The Balls given in honour of the King of Portugal in 1861 and 1863 were particularly glamorous and lavish affairs to which over 500 guests were invited.

The House is still in regular use today as the headquarters of the British Port wine shippers, and many distinguished visitors have been received there in recent years, including HM Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip in 1957. HRH The Princess Anne in 1979 and The Portuguese Prime Minister (now President) Dr. Mário Soares and the British Prime Minister Mrs. Margaret Thatcher in 1984.

The building, with its sombre granite exterior, which belies the elegance of the reception rooms decorated in the style of Robert Adam, stands as a lasting memorial to the merchants and factors of long ago, as well as a living symbol of the continuing British presence in the Port wine Trade.

As Rose Macaulay in "They Went to Portugal" so well described it: "What a magnificent story for nearly three centuries is theirs, how picturesque their calling, how excitingly beautiful its setting, how rich their history in characters & incidents".

Many writers mentioned the Rua Nova dos Ingleses, which was renamed Rua Infante D. Henrique in 1883.

Pinho Leal in "Portugal Antigo e Moderno" 1876, said that the colloquial name for the street was Praça do Comércio, where the British merchants used to meet to transact business. Another writer referred to a Café in the same Praça, where the British Factory met in the middle of the 18th century. This was possibly the same Café as that which Thomas Woodmass, in a report of his visit to Northern Portugal in 1704, described as a tavern in the Rua Nova where he was received by the Consul.

W.H. Kingston, a member of the Factory who subsequently became a well known writer of children's books, described the street as "of no great length but the broadest in the city and contains some good houses. Here the merchants hold their exchange and congregate to talk business or the last new opera". Arthur Costigan in

"Sketches of Society & Manners in Portugal" 1787, also mentioned the street: "To walk much about this city is, I assure you, rather a violent exercise, not one street in it being on a level, excepting that where the most part of the English inhabit".

W.H. Harrison, writing in 1839, declared: "Of all the towns in Portugal, Oporto is that in which the Englishman will find himself most at home".

During the building of the Factory House, which took four years, Whitehead had as his assistant Joaquim da Costa Lima Sampaio who was to become a leading architect in Oporto, responsible for the designs of the Royal Palace, subsequently Museu Nacional Soares dos Reis, built in a style inspired by the new Hospital designed by John Carr, and of the British Chapel completed in 1818. Sampaio's son was also an architect and he designed the Palacio da Bolsa.

John Carr was a distinguished architect in Yorkshire, who had many titled and influential patrons including the Marquis of Rockingham and the Duke of Devonshire and in collaboration with Robert Adam he designed Harewood House near Leeds.

On Whitehead's recommendation, the local authorities asked Carr to submit plans for a general hospital for Oporto. These were accepted and Carr received a fee of £500, a large sum in those days, but one which he considered moderate: "In justice to my experience and abilities in architecture and the esteem and reward which I receive for my design in England, make it necessary perhaps for me to inform your Lordship that £500 would be thought but a very moderate award for such a design in England".

Whitehead had known Carr in England as had the British Chaplain to the Factory at that time the Revd. Henry Wood, also from Yorkshire, and there is little doubt that these two were instrumental in securing the acceptance of Carr's plans. It is interesting that these had become so damaged by damp in 1793 that Sampaio was asked by the Hospital board to make copies, "owing to the skill he had acquired in the house of the English Consul who had made use of his services".

There were critics who considered that the hospital, named Santo António, was too large for Oporto, declaring that "it was an undertaking much too immense for such a place as this, and would

better serve the purpose of a general Infirmary for London or Lisbon.

The architect James Murphy, writing in 1790, held even stronger views: "The General Hospital if completed would be the largest building in Oporto. Although it is upwards of twenty years since the foundation of this structure was laid. there is yet but a wing of one of the pavilions covered in: the rest is raised but a few feet above the surface and is likely to remain in this state, a magnificent modern ruin and a lasting monument of the folly of not proportioning the design to the public purse". Murphy evidently did not know that the building was only held up temporarily due to lack of funds and would be completed later, although in fact the final result was not as large as Carr had planned.

Several of the most important buildings in Oporto can thus be attributed to the influence of John Whitehead, as can the prominent role played by the British Community in the 18th & 19th centuries, not only in architecture and town planning but also in the cultural and social life of the city.

One writer, in the second half of the 18th century, considered that the number and degree of culture of the British community connected with the Port wine trade influenced the city architecture and subsidiary decorative arts of that period. Another, in an account of his visit to Oporto in 1780, considered that "the example and encouragement of the British Factory has been attended with singularly good effects". This was reflected in even such items as furniture and the most prominent cabinet maker of that period, José Francisco de Paiva, made chairs and other pieces for the Factory House and for members of the Port trade using the designs of Chippendale, Sheraton & Hepplewhite. He also produced designs for interior decorations and fireplaces which reflected the style of Robert Adam.

John Whitehead died on the 15th December 1802, aged 76, after serving a remarkable term of office as British Consul of no less than 46 years. He had been responsible for the establishment in 1787 of the first official Protestant cemetery in Oporto and it was here that he was buried and an impressive monument later erected in his memory. The exceptional esteem in which he was held, not only

by the Oporto authorities, but by Portuguese of all classes as well as by the British merchants and many visitors, is proof of his great qualities and confirms the influence he achieved in the city of Oporto. It is no exaggeration to describe him as the most outstanding British personality the community has ever known. But it was only by chance that he came to Oporto at all. When the previous Consul, Robert Jackson, died in August 1756, the Factory offered the post to his nephew. He declined the appointment and so Whitehead was then chosen by the merchants, probably because he was the brother-in-law of William Warre, one of the leading Port shippers. The history of the British in Oporto would certainly have been very different if he had never come here.

The circumstances of his appointment illustrate the independence and degree of autonomy that the merchants enjoyed. Until the early part of the 19th century they were able to nominate their Consuls and also the Chaplains without prior consultation with either the Foreign Office or the Bishop in London, and on Whitehead's death the next Consul was chosen by the Factory almost immediately.

Although this work is primarily concerned with the 18th century, a reference should be made to another Englishman in Oporto, in this case of the 19th century, namely Joseph James Forrester, a controversial figure who achieved distinction in a different field to Whitehead, although in fact they were both highly skilled draughtsmen, James Forrester, whose uncle of the same name had come to Oporto in 1803, was born in Hull in 1809 and joined the Port shippers Offley Webber Forrester in 1831.

A cartographer of considerable ability, he made a survey of the Port wine district of the Douro valley and a map of the River Douro from the mouth below Oporto as far as the Spanish frontier. He published studies on the diseases of the vine and numerous works connected with the wine trade in Portugal. He was created Barão de Forrester by the Portuguese government and received decorations from many countries including France, Spain, Russia and Italy. A talented water-colourist he painted many well known personalities connected with the wine trade as well as statesmen and naval and military men. Possibly his best known work was a picture of the Rua No-

va dos Inglezes showing the figures of most of the British merchants of the time, drawn in 1834.

However he was not viewed with favour by his fellow Port shippers, due to a controversy that lasted many years as to the exact degree of fortification and alcoholic strength desirable in the making of Port wine. He advocated the addition of only so much brandy as was needed to keep the wine sound, a view not shared by his competitors. Forrester was fighting a losing battle, and by the middle of the 19th century Port had almost certainly become, both in strength and style, the type of wine that is now known all over the world.

By the irony of fate, Forrester was drowned in 1861 when his boat capsized in the Upper Douro, the river he knew so well and which he had surveyed in such detail.

To return to earlier times, one of the privileges granted to the British by the Treaty of 1654 was the appointment of a magistrate or lawyer to act as arbitrator in disputes, mostly in connection with the import duties payable on British goods and to settle claims by the merchants, usually in connection with the collection of debts. This Portuguese official had the title of Juiz Conservador and at first the appointment covered the whole country but in 1691 the Oporto Factory were granted their own official, to be paid out of Factory funds and it was a much sought after post which was only abolished in 1826.

This provided further proof of the exceptional privileges and favourable treatment that the British enjoyed although in fact the merchants often complained when things did not go exactly as they wished. They were encouraged in this attitude by the semi-official status granted to the Factory by the authorities in London, of which an example was when the Admiralty gave instructions in 1741 to the Commanders of HM ships stationed off the Portuguese coast that they should obey the directions of the Oporto Factory and be entirely at their disposal.

Similarly the British Minister in Lisbon, Sir Benjamin Keene, wrote in 1749 to the Factory, "to acquaint you with the King's pleasure and to desire you to be assured that in whatever part I may possibly be of any service to the British Factory at Porto or to any

of its worthy members in particular, they shall find a readiness in me to execute their commands".

On the other hand, the Portuguese government did not always approve of some of the activities of the British merchants, in particular those at Lisbon, who benefited by tax exemptions and other advantages under the 1654 Treaty but also engaged in illegal clandestine operations involving the smuggling of gold that originated in Brazil by Royal Navy ships to England, as well as by the regular Packet to Falmouth.

In conclusion, whereas politically the close association between Portugal and Great Britain dates from the 14th century, the special relationship that has existed ever since the 17th century between the British community in the North of Portugal and Portuguese in all walks of life, to an extent certainly not found with other foreign communities, gives real meaning to the Alliance on a personal level far removed from the political expediency that prompted the early treaties three hundred years ago.

The British Factory was always synonymous with the Port wine trade and this has been the principal element throughout the centuries that has given Oporto such a special character.

NOTES

- 1) - I am referring only to permanent communities. There had certainly been, in the previous centuries, a considerable number of British who had come to the North of Portugal, mostly in connection with trade. But in fact among the earliest were Crusaders from the west of England on their way to Palestine.

They called in at Oporto, only to be persuaded to go to Lisbon and give assistance in defeating the Moors, which they did with evident success.

There is an interesting connection with the Crusades in the Factory House at Oporto. This is a painting by Francisco Vieira (Portuguese) signed and dated 1798, depicting Edward I and Queen Eleanor at the siege of Acre during the last Crusade, with the Queen sucking the poison out of a wound inflicted by a poisoned dagger in the King's arm.

The painting, which was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1798, was inspired by a work by Angelika Kauffmann on the same theme. Vieira had known her in Rome and later in London and he is considered to be one of the leading Portuguese painters of the 18th century. The Factory House picture is being loaned to an important exhibition of Portuguese art to be held at the Petit Palais in Paris in October 1987.

- 2) - 'Letters from Viana do Castelo and Oporto written in 1703/4 by Thomas Woodmass to his father in England'.

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