

## **George Croft (1808 – 1874)**

After a very interesting and well-organised British Historical Society visit to the Convent of Batalha and the coal museum and George Croft's mines, I was asked to write a short article about my ancestor, George Croft, who was my great-great-great-grandfather. Easier said than done.... but after digging and delving through old family papers, books, letters, documents, and speaking to family members, I was astonished about the amount of interesting information I managed to gather ! I have always loved History, but when it comes to studying your own family history it's even more exciting! Below I attempt to write a résumé of George Croft's life and memories

*By Ana Croft de Moura Possolo*



**George Croft**

I will begin to explain a little about the family history and then talk about his role in Portuguese Society of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. George Croft was born in Manchester on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May 1808, and died in Lisbon on the 26<sup>th</sup> January 1874. He is buried in the British Cemetery in Lisbon. His parents were Thomas Croft Esq. and Sarah Simpson. George had a brother, Frederick, and a sister, Sarah.

George Croft was married at St. George's Church in Lisbon on the 21<sup>st</sup> June 1834. According to St. George's church records of the time, they state that his brother Frederick Croft and cousin William Croft were witnesses to this marriage.

He married a Portuguese lady, Maria Luciana de Oliveira, daughter of the Barão de Barcelinhos, ( Manuel José de Oliveira and his wife Luciana Maria de Oliveira, owners of the Palácio de Barcelinhos, previously the Convento do Espirito Santo da Pedreira in the Chiado, in Lisbon.).



**George and Maria Luciana Croft**

George and Maria Luciana had three children:

- *Thomas Elmesley de Oliveira Croft* - 2nd Visconde da Graça - Born on the 12<sup>th</sup> June 1846 and died 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1904. An interesting fact about Thomas Croft, was that he loved bull fighting, and was known to have taken part in several bullfights, both on foot and horseback, together with the Marques de Belas and the Conde de Vimioso, in Lisbon, Santarem, Vila Franca and Oporto. He was also one of the founder members of the Portuguese Clube Tauromaquico in 1892.

He first married Ana Mafalda Coutinho Seabra (daughter of the Condes da Abrigada) and after he became a widower he married Julieta Sales da Cunha Galvao (born in Rio de Janeiro, daughter of Manuel da Cunha Galvao, from the Council of D.Pedro II, Emperor of Brazil). There was no issue from either of these marriages.

- *Luciana Maria de Oliveira Croft* - born on the 28<sup>th</sup> August 1838 and died on the 15<sup>th</sup> December 1863. Married Manuel de Moura Valdez, knight of the Portuguese Royal House, and Captain of the Portuguese Army Cavalry. They had three children:
  - Jose Maria Croft de Moura, who married Lucy Wynn Custance (my great-grand parents);
  - Manuel Croft de Moura, who married Albertina Dias Ferreira;
  - Maria Luciana Croft de Moura, who married Augusto Dias Ferreira.

After her husband Manuel de Moura Valdez died, Luciana Maria de Oliveira married Bernardino da Costa Lobo da Bandeira-Conde de Porto Covo da Bandeira . There was no issue from this marriage either.

- *Cecilia Sarah de Oliveira Croft* - born on the 8<sup>th</sup> March 1845 and died 7<sup>th</sup> October 1870, who married Joao Maria de Magalhaes, a Major in the Portuguese Army. They had no issue.

George Croft was an important industrialist, founder of a glass factory at Marinha Grande, and owned coal and iron mines in the District of Leiria.

In 1870, George Croft was enobled by King D. Luis I, with the title of Visconde da Graça. The title of Visconde da Graça comes from the name of George Croft's quinta, called Quinta da Graça, in the Olivais district of Lisbon.

His son, Thomas Elmesley Croft, was the 2<sup>nd</sup> Visconde da Graça, and as he had no issue from his marriages, the representation of the title passed to the descendants of his sister, Luciana Maria de Oliveira Croft.

George Custance Croft de Moura, the oldest son of José Maria Croft de Moura and Lucy Custance is the representative of the title.

### **Out of curiosity .... Croft and Craft**

As a child I remember my grandfather mentioning this story to us, and I have heard it several times amongst the family and cousins.

When reading the “Maias”, of Eça de Queiroz, one of the characters is called “Craft” (with an **a**) which leads us to think that it could be a simulation of “Croft”, with an intentional aim of the author to dissimulate the identity of the real Croft! In the following passage from the “Maias” one can verify that “Craft” and “Croft” (George) were both English, had mines, and a Quinta in the Olivais! Coincidences, or maybe not ?.....

*“É que você é um sensual-disse Craft - e a propósito de sensualidade e Babilónia, quer vir você almoçar ao Bragança? Eu tenho de lá encontrar um Inglês, o meu homem das **minas** .... Mas havemos de ir pela Rua do Ouro, que quero trepar num instante á caverna do meu procurador, e a caminho, que é meio dia!”*

We believe that George Croft descends from the Crofts of Croft Castle in Herefordshire. There is another Croft branch in York, which is possibly related to the Hereford branch, as they both share the same coat of arms.

Sir John Croft, one of the first Port wine traders, used a similar coat of arms as George Croft. Although John Croft descends from the



**The Croft Coat-of-Arms (1671)**

Crofts of Farnham Hall in Yorkshire, and George Croft descends from the Crofts of Herefordshire, there could be a connection.

Sir John Croft was conferred the Honorary Order of the Tower and Sword (Ordem da Torre e Espada) and was given the title of Barão da Serra da Estrela in 1854. This was granted to him by the Portuguese queen D. Maria II.

In “Oporto, old and new”, Charles Sellers considers John Croft one of the earliest shippers of Red Portuguese wines. John Croft wrote the famous Treaties on the wines of Portugal, since the establishment of the English Factory in Oporto. His pamphlet, published in 1788, says:

*“It will thus be seen that Mr. Croft fixes the commencement of the importation of Portugal wines into England at about 1688”.*

He adds ....

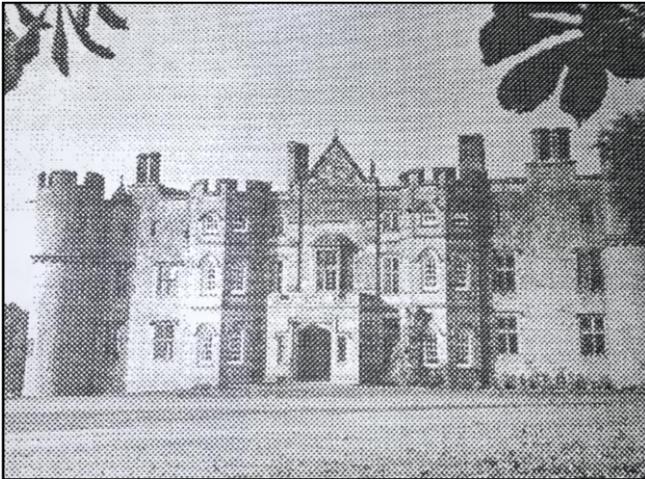
*“It was about a hundred years ago that Portugal wines were at first imported into England, and chiefly or principally about the reign of Queen Anne”.*

## **Croft Castle - Herefordshire**

The following description taken from National Trust extracts give us a very real and detailed picture of the castle and its history.

The family of Croft, which is of Saxon origin, settled in Hereford at a very remote period. The famous and very knightly family of the Crofts were for 400 years styled “de Croft”. They may have come to England from Normandy, even before the conquest. At all events, they were persons of consequence from the Middle Ages until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. When their fortunes declined they were compelled, shortly before 1750, to sell their ancient castle (Croft Castle Herefordshire).

Their return to Croft Castle in 1923, is thus a romantic story, and Lord Croft, who now lives in the castle, represents one of the oldest territorial links in the country. Originally a Marcher castle - a Croft married the daughter of Owain Glyndwr - the plan of Croft is roughly square, enclosing a courtyard, with a tower at each corner. Walls and towers probably date from the 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> century, and for some 400 years, there was a gate at the centre of the entrance front, giving carriage access to the open courtyard an arrangement resembling that found in Medieval castles and the Colleges of Oxford and Cambridge.



**Croft Castle Herefordshire**

The association of Croft at this period with the Knight and Johnes families who were connected with the neo-Gothic movement, may account for some of the most engaging features of the interior, such as the Gothic staircase with its delightful plasterwork, the rococo detail of the ceilings and the painted bookcases in the Library.

Other rooms of interest are the Oak room, with its 17<sup>th</sup> century paneling and chimneypiece, and the drawing-room with early 18<sup>th</sup> century paneling.

The church that lies across the lawn is roughly contemporary with the castle, and its most notable feature is the early 16<sup>th</sup> century altar tomb to Sir Richard Croft and his wife. Sir Richard captured the unfortunate young Prince of Wales at the battle of Tewksbury and eventually became Treasurer of the King's household.

The grounds at Croft offer an interesting contrast to the classic 18<sup>th</sup> century parkland, associated with the work of Capability Brown. The great avenues, which are the splendour of Croft, were flourishing a century before Brown was born. Happily, they escaped the axe of the Georgian "improvers", so that Croft boasts some of the finest oaks in the country, with girths of forty feet, and an avenue of sweet chestnuts, stretching nearly half a mile and perhaps 350 years old.

If Croft was largely spared the attentions of Brown and his followers, its fish pool valley, clearly reflects the later "picturesque" movement and the reaction against the earlier school of landscape. Uvedale Price and Richard Payne Knight, who between them may be said to have invented the "picturesque" were not only Herefordshire squires, but were on terms with the contemporary owners of Croft. The fish pool valley with its drama, its variety of contour, its mixed planting and its linked pools, is a direct expression of their theories.

Victorian additions to Croft are the splendid Wellingtonias, deodar cedars, redwoods, Monterey pines, limes and other trees in the garden and park. There is a good Oriental plane and a remarkable self-layered horse chestnut. A Gothic arch, another legacy of the

“picturesque” gives access to the garden adjoining the house. There is a mixed border on the right, followed by rhododendrons and holm oaks, underplanted with Spring bulbs and Autumn cyclamens. Various choice shrubs grow around the castle walls, on which roses and clematis are trained. Beyond stretches a pastoral countryside.

### **George Croft and the “Marinha Grande” glass factory**

The glass industry of Marinha Grande began when the Real Fábrica of Coina, founded by King D. João V in 1719, moved from the left side of the river Tagus, to the parish of Nossa Senhora do Rosário in the district of Leiria, in 1747.

This enterprise began with John Beare, an Irishman who was the last administrator of the Real Fábrica of Coina. Beare moved all his workmen and apprentices together with all the techniques, tools and equipment to the Leiria area, where he could get cheaper fuel and of better quality for the glass industry.

In 1769, William Stephens, from Exeter, was invited by King D. José I to continue and re-organise the work that John Beare had begun at the factory. The new factory, now named the “Real Fábrica de Vidros da Marinha Grande”, resumed its activity on the 16<sup>th</sup> October 1769, just producing glass. The manufacture of crystal glass was only introduced in the Marinha Grande factory at the end of 1770.

Initially, the Stephens brothers were not very concerned about innovation. They had good Portuguese technicians, some who still came from Coina. The lead cristal, known in England since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, only arrived to Portugal later. Until then the glasses that were made in Portugal were plain glass, crystal quartz, and semi crystals.

Later, William Stephens began using new engraving and lapidation techniques, for decorative purposes, and that had begun in England and Bohemia. For this, he sent for foreign technicians, like Antony Taubner, from Bohemia, whose objective was to embellish and polish the glass.

After John Stephens' death, and according to his will, the factory was left to the Portuguese government in 1826, and sadly things began to decline. Two new management teams saved the factory from disaster.

The first one was run by the Portuguese industrialist, Manuel Joaquim Afonso, who later became the Head of the Fábrica das Gaivotas and founder of the Fábrica de Loiça de Sacavém. He introduced steam engines at Marinha Grande, as well as new lapidation techniques. Between 1864 to 1894, the Marinha Grande factory was managed by George Croft (Visconde da Graça), together with António Augusto Dias de Freitas, (Visconde da Azarujinha). The factory was now known by "Empresa da Real Fábrica de Vidros da Marinha Grande". During this period, new furnaces and technologies were implemented. Crystal had become very much in demand, and Marinha Grande received large orders for crystal dinners sets from the Portuguese Royal House, as well as many private orders.

### **George Croft's mines**

The Diário do Governo - Ministry of 'Obras Publicas, Comercio and Industria' – stated in December 1852 that George Croft, the owner of coal and iron mines in the Leiria district, was granted the concession of the mines of Alcanadas and Chao Preto, near Batalha. He had the concession of 10 mines, covering an area from Porto de Mós to Pombal.



**The railway line at the Barrojeiras Mine**



**The entrance to the Mine Shafts of Alcanadas (left) and Barrojeiras (right)**

At the time the railway line between Lisbon and Oporto was nearly concluded, and Pombal was very close to the railway, which would be an important factor for transporting the iron extracted from the mines.

In 1862 a group of English mine engineers, Thomas Runball, James Ferrie, and William Mundle, visited George Croft's mines and after examining the iron minerals, concluded that the iron found in George Croft's mines was suitable to produce "pig iron", which would be transformed into "bar iron". They considered it similar to "bovey-coal", which is also found in Yorkshire.

They also wrote in their reports that they considered that there were large quantities of iron, and that in their opinion, there would be enough to be extracted for at least 10 years, and the cost should not exceed 5 shillings per ton! They referred that the district of Leiria and Batalha was well adapted for the manufacture iron, as the properties of the soil are rich in coal, stone, limestone, clay, as well as being surrounded by woodland and forests. They also considered that the quality of the Portuguese iron is superior to English iron, therefore better for producing better quality guns and weapons, and items for new industry.

A few years ago, I received a curious letter from a Portuguese priest from Leiria, who was doing research on the whereabouts of a Roman mosaic that had supposedly been discovered in Maceira, Leiria, on one of George Croft's mines. Unfortunately it was difficult to locate the whereabouts of this mosaic, and only parts of it were found. It is called "Orfeu I". There are many other Roman vestiges in this area.

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*Ana Croft de Moura Possolo is the daughter of Mafalda Lithgow Croft de Moura and Alexandre Possolo. She and her younger brother Tomaz, were born in Lisbon and lived for many years in the peaceful Lapa area, where most of their family had lived for several generations. George Croft also lived nearby in Lisbon, in the Principe Real area, in the old "Rua Formosa", which is now called the Rua do Século. Ana studied at the Bom Sucesso school in Belém, run by the Irish nuns. She completed her teacher's training and presently teaches at the IPS school. In 2017, and as Lisbon became busier, she decided to move to the Sintra family house, where she now lives. One of her passions is History as well as carrying out research and visiting historical places.*