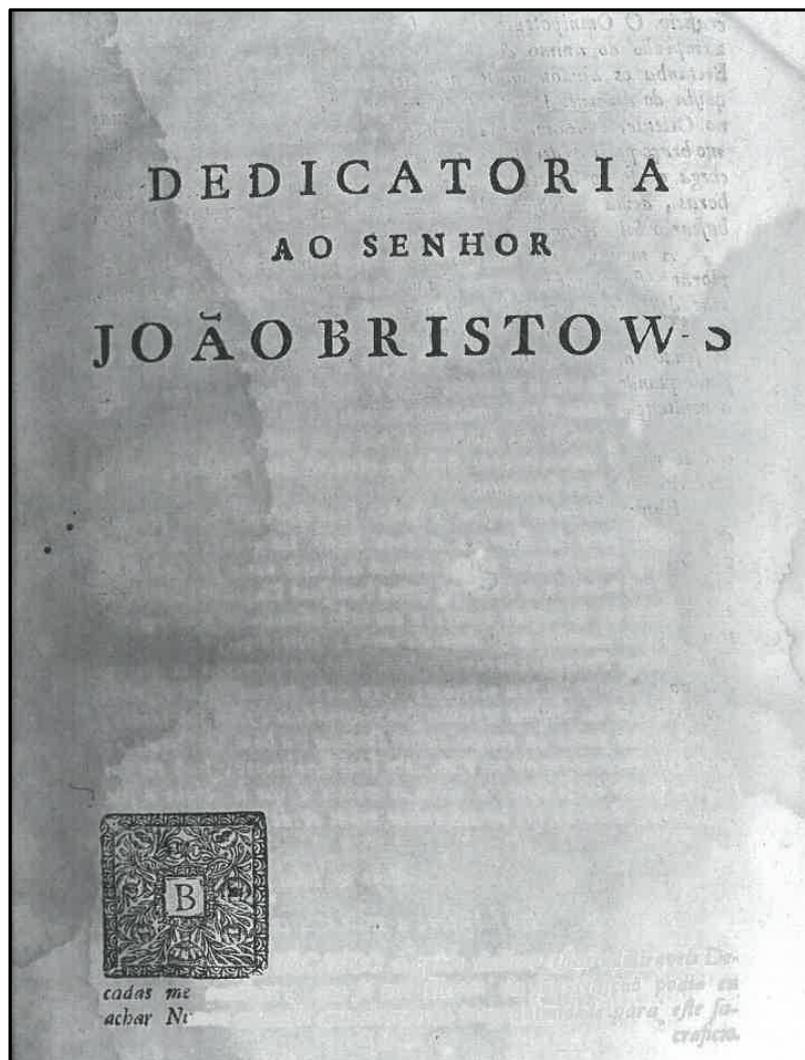


## John Bristow (1707 - 1768) and the Lisbon Earthquake

With thanks to Dr<sup>a</sup> Clara Andrade, Municipal Librarian at Lagoa, for readily supplying the image from the title and dedicatory pages of the volume of 1752, and for permission to use them. Thanks are also due to Malcolm Justins for help with the Latin, and Isabel Macieira for help with translating the opaque Portuguese.

*By Peter Booker*

When I entered the Municipal Library at Lagoa in September, 2015, I was astonished to see on display an old volume dedicated to João Bristow's. It was opened at the title page. This book was a copy of the first of the *Décadas da Ásia* by João de Barros, the earliest and perhaps the most famous of the historians of the Portuguese Empire. This particular volume was published in 1752 and the bottom of the title page shows: Printed at the cost of Reinerio Bocache, Bookseller, resident at Old Conceição Square. (*Impressa à custa de Reinerio Bocache, Mercador de livros; morador no Largo da Conceição Velha*).



**“Décadas da Ásia”, by João de Barros - 1752**

The dedicatory preface is couched in the most fulsome and obsequious praise of not only Bristow, but of the English nation. The language is oblique and impenetrable, and my translation, such as it is, follows:

Dedication to Mr John Bristow's:

Searching for someone to whom to dedicate these admirable Décadas, it occurred to me that only among the heroes of your nation could I find inspiration placed on the altars of magnanimity for this sacrifice.

The Omnipotent always brought the English arm to stiffen the spirit of the Portuguese; and so an Armada from Great Britain helped them in the capture of Lisbon and another fleet in the conquest of the Algarve. From this it follows that this narrative of Portugal's arms in the East, where the dawn comes first, must seek the same arm so that the same inspiration may appear; and just as in England the time taken from morning to night is eighteen hours, so for the protection of this writer must the Lusitanian nation look for the sun where the day lasts longest.

The memory of the triumphs of Portugal drove me all the more to entreat this patron; because, as already sung by our poet, this Kingdom's victories have been given by the Angels:

*O' que os Anjos deceraõ a ajudarnos (O that the Angels shall come down to help us)*

And the English also being compared with Angels, as St Gregory said when he saw them for the first time, and a modern poet even made this comparison with England [*Anglia*], saying;

*Que de Anglicos a Anjelicos passarão (That Englishmen will become Angels)*

This was the reason for the use of Angels to decorate the pictures our deeds, which would be attributed to their angelic hierarchies.

Among all of them (*Englishmen*) I have preferred Mr John Bristow's as the protector of the famous João de Barros; it is possible to associate only a Maecenas with so great a name from Great Britain with so great an author of Portugal. John the First of Portugal met a John, Duke of Lancaster; and Your Excellency (*V m = Vossa Mercê*) who has the same name, and amongst whose forbears you could show many Lancasters, must by the same measure protect the King of the Portuguese Historians, who is also João.

Your Excellency does not allow me to speak of the splendour of your nobility; and I yield because people (*the voices*) proclaim your repeated generosity enough; your acts of generosity are so many that from them alone I could arrange other Décadas; one William Longsword corresponds in Your Excellency to one João with Long Hands (*Lonjimano – i.e., very generous?*). In sum, John which is the name of Thanks, and among the many graces your magnificence is spoken of, it is obvious that there will be among them some who also bear your name.

I kiss Your Excellency's hands

Your faithful servant and most respectful retainer

Reinerio Bocache

I was intrigued by the name of the dedicatee and the publication date is just three years before the disastrous Lisbon earthquake. I had no idea who Bristow's was, beyond the fact that he appeared to be British, or English according to Bocache, nor how he had become the dedicatee of one of the masterpieces of Portuguese history. Reinerio Bocache was also a name which is unlike any Portuguese name I have ever encountered. The whole presented a mystery which required a solution.

John Bristow (1701- 1768) was in fact a member of a family of wealthy London merchants. His father Robert Bristow (1662 – 1706) had made his fortune in Virginia, before returning to London, where he set up as a merchant and in 1694 invested in the new Bank of England. Robert became a Member of Parliament for Winchelsea 1698-1701; his eldest son Robert (1688 -1737) became MP for Winchelsea 1708 - 1737; and his grandson Robert (1712 - 1776) also became MP for Winchelsea 1738 – 1741 and later New Shoreham 1747 - 1761.

As the third surviving son, John Bristow had to find another parliamentary seat, and he was adopted for Bere Alston (on the border between Devon and Cornwall) in 1734, where most of the burgage properties came to be owned by the Hobart family, then St Ives (Cornwall) in 1741, Bere Alston again in 1754 and lastly Arundel in 1761. All of these parliamentary constituencies were pocket boroughs. Bere Alston was also a rotten borough and by the time of the Great Reform Act in 1832 there were only 112 houses within the borough boundaries, and probably only thirty voters (as freehold tenants of certain specific properties).

As we see on his tombstone, John Bristow was proud that he had been an MP for thirty-four years continuously and had been elected five times. He voted consistently with the government and sat in the interest of his brother-in-law, Sir John Hobart, later created 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Buckinghamshire in 1746. Hobart's promotion to the peerage may have been assisted by the fact that his sister, Henrietta Countess of Suffolk, was the long-time mistress of George II.

John Bristow himself became a merchant of some consequence. After the outbreak of war with Spain in 1739 he, in partnership with Peter Burrell, MP for Haslemere, secured contracts for remitting money to pay the British forces in Gibraltar, Minorca (about £200 000 pa) and Jamaica. This last contract was on such favourable terms that it gave rise to allegations that, to oblige Bristow and Burrell as government supporters in the House of Commons, Walpole had made a bad bargain for the public. Just before he fell from power in 1742, Walpole was created Earl of Orford, and immediately after his fall, the matter was investigated by the secret committee set up by the Commons to inquire into his conduct. No action was taken on the committee's report, even though it endorsed the charges against him, observing that:

*... throughout the whole course of this proceeding ... neither the interest of the soldier or the public service seemed to have been the object of the Earl of Orford's attention.*

Bristow also played a part in financing the continental war. He was included in the Treasury list of underwriters of a government loan in 1744, his share being £150,000. In the same year he was appointed a trustee for managing a loan of £200,000 to the King of Sardinia.

He was also concerned in the raising of supplies for the war in 1746, and in 1753 he was one of the financiers who lent £90,000 to the city of Danzig.

In the middle of the century, John Bristow was a leading figure in the South Sea Company, whose Governor was no less than King George II. Bristow was a director of the South Sea Company 1730-33; deputy governor 1733-56; and sub-governor 1756-62, where he succeeded his colleague Peter Burrell, sub-governor 1736-56. (The Sub-governor was the senior non-royal official, and the deputy governor was deputy to him.) By 1754, Bristow was perhaps the foremost British merchant in the Portugal trade (including of course Spain, South America and the West Indies) and by 1755, he was in partnership and trading as Bristow, Ward and Company.

In 1738, the new Portuguese ambassador to the Court of St James arrived in London. He was Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo, much later known as the Marquês de Pombal. (I shall follow the normal practice, and refer to him as Pombal, even though he was not known as Pombal until he was raised to the rank of Marquês de Pombal in 1770). Finding his London ambassadorial residence in poor repair, Pombal had borrowed money from a Sephardi diamond merchant, Francisco Salvador, in order to rent and modify more suitable premises. After some time, Salvador began to demand his money back, and the government of Portugal was in no position to pay. Eventually, in 1747, Bristow lent money to the Portuguese government to repay Salvador the sum of £2,437.

In January, 1752, Bristow became embroiled in a difficulty in Lisbon. Portuguese customs officials suspected that gold bullion was being smuggled on board an English ship, the *Lyme*. Clearly thinking that Bristow was engaged in this contraband bullion trade, a customs officer came to Bristow's house to inform him that the ship was to be searched, and there ensued on board the *Lyme* a confrontation between sailors and customs men, with guns drawn. Although his fellow Factory members felt that he had overplayed his hand, Bristow could count on the friendship of Pombal, and by the early spring of 1752, Pombal had indeed intervened in favour of his English friend, asserting that the consequences to Portugal would be grave if the bullion trade to England were stopped.

Following his policy of setting up monopolies on his own terms, Pombal then devised a plan to concentrate the European distribution of Brazilian diamonds in a Christian monopoly, specifically to oppose the Jewish dominance of the diamond trade in northern Europe. By February 1753, the king had agreed to grant to John Bristow for six years the European monopoly to sell Brazilian diamonds. Bristow's partner in this contract was the Dutchman, Herman Joseph Braamcamp. It is surprising to us that, to form a contract for the monopoly trade of diamonds, Pombal turned to an Englishman who was a known smuggler of gold bullion. This strange fact may be explained by the respect felt by Pombal for the commercial expertise of English merchants, and for Bristow's skill in particular.

At this time, it appears that Pombal learned that Bristow was still secretly in partnership with the New Christian Francisco Salvador, Pombal's former demanding creditor in London. This discovery did nothing to improve his relationship with Bristow, since Pombal suspected

that the New Christian Salvador had given commercial advice to the Portuguese government which had proved of great personal benefit to Salvador himself, and because it was Pombal's purpose to divert the diamond trade away from the Jewish network.

In the earthquake, and subsequent tsunami and fire of 1<sup>st</sup> of November 1755 over 10,000 people died in Lisbon, and the effect on most of the survivors was disastrous. A Special Edition published by the British Historical Society of Portugal in 1987 shows an eyewitness account of the fire which consumed the city in the aftermath of the earthquake: " 'Tis likewise generally believed, that Mr Bristow's house, which was an exceeding strong edifice, built on vast stone arches, and had stood the shocks without any great damage farther than what I have mentioned, was consumed in the same manner. The fire in short may be said to have destroyed by some means or other, the whole city, at least everything that was grand or valuable in it."

One of the consequences of the damage caused by this disaster was that Bristow could no longer fulfil his contractual obligations in the diamond monopoly, and the arrangement was terminated in 1756 in favour of Joshua van Neck and John Gore in London, and their Lisbon contacts, David Purry and Gerardo Devisme. This last name is so unusual that it almost certainly also belongs to the wealthy owner of the first Palácio de Monserrate in Sintra.

In the wake of the disaster, in November of 1755 Messrs Bristow, Burrell and Gore were asked by the Treasury in London "to procure provisions" for Portugal and in December, Bristow and Burrell were appointed to provide money for "the relief of those distressed in Portugal including British subjects". They were to be paid £100,000 to cover all expenses.

Burrell died in 1756, and Bristow continued to remit money on contract to Minorca and Gibraltar for the pay of the troops. A certain James West wrote to Newcastle on 8 May, 1756, "Mr Bristow continues sullen and told me he could say nothing further.....but as he has a favour to ask of Your Grace for the late extra supply of beef to Minorca, I think...he will acquiesce in being joined with Mr Fisher". After the loss of Minorca, Bristow retained the contract for the remittance of money for the regiments transferred to Gibraltar, and received a share of the contract for the victualing of its garrison. He was required by government to take a new partner, Brice Fisher MP, to replace the deceased Burrell.

Bristow was returned as MP for Arundel in 1761, and in Lord Bute's list of December 1761, he is classed as "Newcastle; government", together with "Hurt in circumstances". I understand these phrases to mean that he was a supporter of Prime Minister the Duke of Newcastle, and that his financial status was damaged, clearly as a result of the losses he had incurred after the earthquake.

We find Bristow writing to the Duke of Newcastle in September 1761 acknowledging that he was unable to remit to the troops of Gibraltar the money that had been paid to him for that purpose; the sum in question was £18,000, and he asked for time to pay. At that time, he showed that his estate at Quidenham in Norfolk was worth about £36,000, and that sums owed to him in Portugal exceeded £120,000, "and of that sum there is due from the Crown of Portugal more than treble what he stands indebted on account of his contract for remitting (to) the garrison of Gibraltar."

In the Parliament of 1761 – 1768, there is no record of Bristow having spoken, and it appears that he never even voted. In May, 1763 he went to Portugal to seek to recover his debts, and because he never again appears in the parliamentary lists, it is probable that he never returned to England.

We find that again in 1765, he wrote to former Prime Minister Newcastle to ask for government help in securing his rights against the King of Portugal; and in 1767 he wrote to ask the Treasury to remit the payment of interest on his debt of over £17 000. This request was granted “in consideration of the great losses which the memorialist has sustained by unavoidable misfortunes”. Bristow did not stand in the parliamentary election of April 1768, and died on 14 November that year.

After the earthquake, people who owed money to others really were, or pretended to be, incapable of raising the money to pay their debts. The estate of Manuel Gomes de Carvalho e Silva, deceased, formerly Lieutenant General of the Navy Yard, an official of the Crown of Portugal and for some time also a contractor to the Crown, owed Bristow, Ward and Company a large sum. His heirs pleaded that they could not pay the company until they had been paid by the Crown of Portugal fourteen sums totalling 105,504\$577 *reis*, or £29,673 3s 3d in *folhas* or debentures. The *folhas* carried interest of six and a quarter per cent. There were further sums due from Gomes’ estate which bore the same interest rate and these they assigned to Bristow, who was also owed considerable sums amounting to over £120,000 by other subjects of the King of Portugal.

When in May 1763, Bristow returned to Portugal in order to collect the debts due to him, he took with him a letter of recommendation from the Secretary of State, the Earl of Egremont, to Edward Hay, the envoy in Lisbon. Hay went with him to see Pombal, who received him in a friendly fashion, but who always found reasons why the debt could not be settled. The continual pressing of Bristow’s claims by Hay proved in fact to be futile. Gomes having assigned the *folhas* to Bristow in 1755, who was entitled to the payment of them from the Crown of Portugal, totally independently from any other settlement of accounts between Gome’s estate and the Crown, or between Bristow himself and the Crown. In March, 1766, the matter of debts owed to Bristow was in the hands of three judges, and by October, 1766, Bristow had only been paid a sum of between £7,000 and £8,000 by debtors other than the Crown.

Bristow was of course not alone in suffering financial loss as a result of the earthquake and subsequent fire and tsunami, but the amount of money owed to him was so large that the outcome for him was that he had lost his whole business in Portugal, and had to borrow on the debentures in order to live. His creditors in England, Henry Hobart and others, were also the losers by the refusal of the Crown of Portugal to honour its debts.

John Bristow died in Lisbon on 14 November, 1768, a ruined man.

He lies buried in the British Cemetery in Lisbon, in grave No. A.5.59.

The Latin inscription on the tomb reads:

Johanni Bristow  
In Senatum Magnae Britanniae  
Quinquies lecto

To John Bristow  
Five times elected  
To the Parliament of Great Britain

Anna Juditha Foissin  
Conjuge benemerente  
Et sibi

And to Anna Judith Foisin  
Herself  
His praiseworthy wife

Vixit anos 67  
Ex his cum illa 37  
Ob Nov 14 1768

He lived for 67 years  
Of which 37 with her  
He died on 14 November 1768

Quisquis hoc sustulerit  
Aut juserit ultimus  
Suorum moriatur

Whoever erected or ordered  
this monument, may he be the  
last of his family to die

The Latin is not perfect, and with help I have made of the translation what seems best. The last sentence appears to show that the tombstone was anonymously paid for by someone outside the Bristow family.

July 20: James Toller, also of the Lilly, —  
 Captain Forbes —  
 Aug. 8: George Thomas, aged one year, son of  
 George Bulkeley —  
 September 1: Alice Barclay, Mother of George Barclay —  
 Merchant —  
 November 1: John Mayne, Merchant —  
 14: John Bristow, Merchant —  
 16: John Dyson — Merchant —  
 December 1: . . . . . Dyer, Officer of an English  
 Man of War —  
 22: Martha, Daughter of Mr. Hoare, Banker  
 of London —  
 1769  
 January 9: Ambrose, son of Mr. Hudson, born the  
 same day —  
 16: Jacob Greves, Hamburgher, Broker —  
 Feb. 9: Dorothy wife of . . . . . Courser Esquire of  
 Ireland —

**Entry in the records of the British cemetery, St George's, Lisbon - 1768**

Bristow had made his will on 23 April, 1768 and it was witnessed by Francis Gosling, William Allen and MA Ibbetson, the vice-consul, and on 14th November, Gosling, Allen and Ibbetson together with Thomas Dear and Joseph May went to Bristow's house in the street of Bella Vista, found the will "sealed with three seals of red wax all of them entirely perfect" and opened it. Ann Judith must have then taken the will to London, because on her personal application as his widow, the will was proved at the Prerogative Court of Canterbury on 18 March, 1769. As she was also an executrix, Ann Judith Bristow was granted the administration of the will. The court reserved the power to make a similar grant to the other executors, the Honourable Henry Hobart Esq (John's son-in-law) and Henry Bristow Esq. (John's son-in-law), as and when they should apply. A copy of the will remains in the National Archives in London, made in longhand by a clerk, possibly in 1769, and its 18<sup>th</sup> Century script is not easy to read.

The value of the Crown of Portugal's debt to the firm of Bristow, Ward & Co was so large that the Crown was in long-lasting difficulty over their settlement. The matter was continually pressed by British envoys, and finally, in 1792, it was ordered that they be paid.

The publisher of the first volume of the *Décadas*, Reinerio Bocache, had in 1749 published another historical work, *Chronica do serenissimo senhor rei D Manoel*, by Damião de Góis. That publication was dedicated to D Rodrigo António de Noronha e Menezes, son of the Marquês de Marialva. Noronha and Menezes are two of the most ancient and aristocratic names in the history of Portugal. For John Bristow, an Englishman and a foreigner with no

aristocratic pretensions, it must have been pleasing or even flattering to be considered in the same way as the son of one of the greatest noble houses of Portugal. This comparison gives some idea of the position held by the English Bristow in pre-earthquake Lisbon.

As well as the *Chronica do serenissimo senhor rei D Manoel*, Reinerio Bocache had also published in 1748 the *Historia Nova, Famosa, e Exemplar da Hespanhola Ingleza* by Miguel de Cervantes, (*traduzida da língua espanhola no nosso idioma portuguez*). A. A. Gonçalves Rodrigues, writing in the Coimbra University Bulletin in 1951, declared that Reinerio Bocache is mysterious, and that the name is a pseudonym for an individual as yet unidentified to the author's knowledge.

Beyond the fact that Bristow was at the time clearly favoured by Pombal, I can find no further information on why he should have been honoured by Reinerio Bocache, nor why the book chosen for his dedication should be the first *Década da Ásia* of João de Barros, nor any evidence which proves the generosity referred to by Bocache in his dedication. Until new evidence comes to light on Bocache, it is difficult to be certain of his motivation in seeking the favour of Bristow, particularly since he shows on the title page that he himself paid for the printing of the book. Quite apart from the historical context, I think that we shall also never know how it was that Bristow's name came to be shown in the possessive both on the title page and in the dedication.

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