# The Sellers Family in Portugal – Part 1 (1830s-1955)

This is the first of a two-part series on the Oporto-based Sellers family, which has been in Portugal since the early 19th century. The first part tells the story starting from the origins of the Sellers family through to the fourth generation. The second part will bring us up to contemporary times, with the history of the fourth and fifth generations The author, Michael Sellers, is a member of the fifth generation of this well-known family and a great-great-nephew of the fabled author Charles Sellers, who wrote the classic work entitled 'Oporto, Old and New Old'[1] in 1899.

*By Michael Sellers*

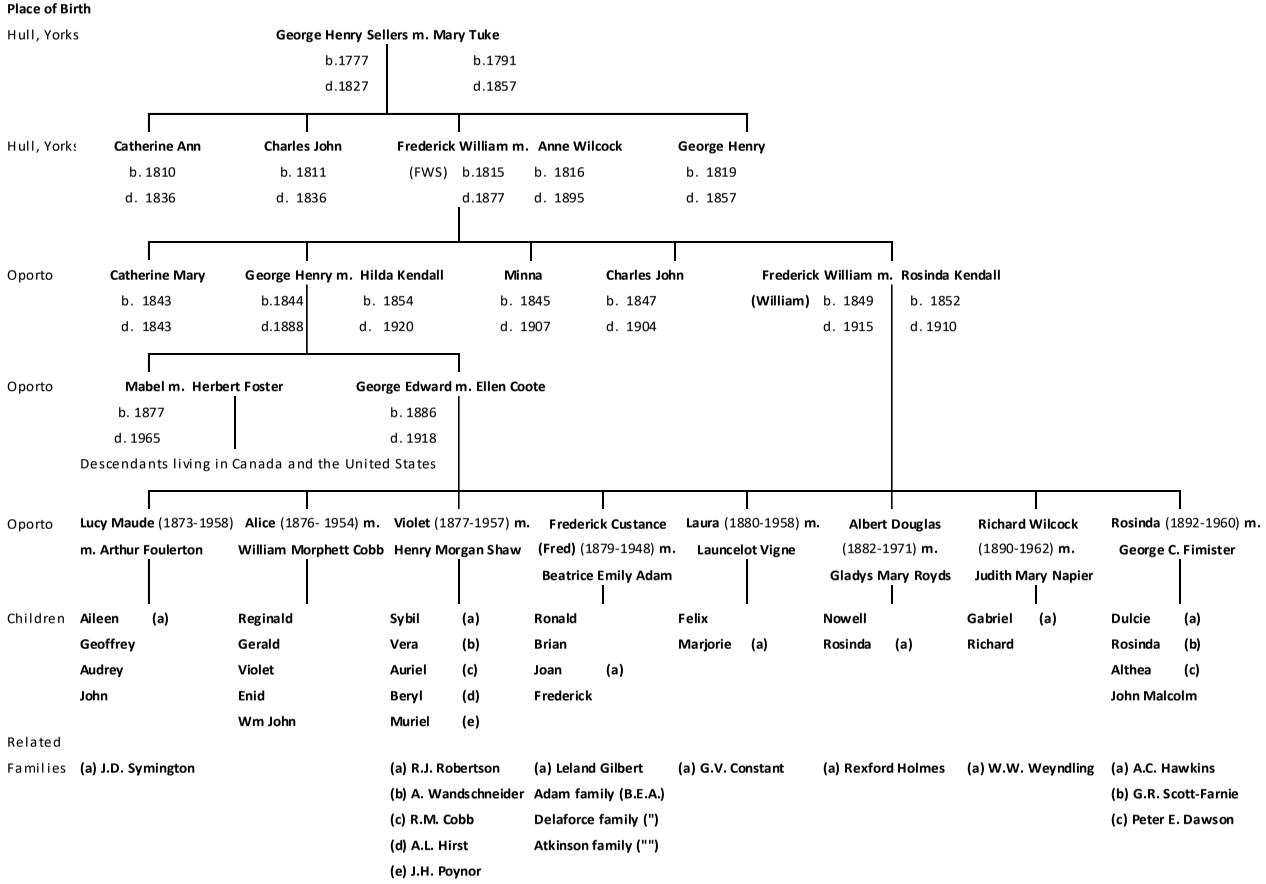
## The Family's origins[2]

The Sellers clan has its origins in the Lowlands of Scotland. During the 17th century, improving education standards in the lowland parishes led to the founding of several universities and the creation of a more highly educated middle class. In an underdeveloped Scottish economy, however, there were few job opportunities for the better-educated population and emigration south to England began, as well as to the Balkan States and North America.

The Sellers chose the path to England and this migration split into two factions, one settling in Lancashire, where they changed their name to Sellar or Sellars, and the other went to reside in Yorkshire, where they maintained the original spelling.

[1] 'Oporto, Old and New Old: being a Historical Record of the Port Wine Trade, and a Tribute to British Commercial Enterprize in the North of Portugal', by Charles Sellers. Published in 1899 by Howard & Jones, 15 & 16 Cullum Street, Fenchurch Street, E.C.

[2] The sources of the author's research in retracing the Sellers family history are essentially the letters from FWS to his eldest son George Henry from 1851 to 1863, as well as letters exchanged between his grandfather and his brother and Canadian cousins.


Place of Birth
Hull, Yorks
George Henry Sellers m. Mary Tuke
b.1777
d.1827
b.1791
d.1857
Hull, Yorks
Catherine Ann
b. 1810
d. 1836
Charles John
b. 1811
d. 1836
Frederick William m. Anne Wilcock
(FWS) b.1815
d.1877
b. 1816
d. 1895
George Henry
b. 1819
d. 1857
Oporto
Catherine Mary
b. 1843
d. 1843
George Henry m. Hilda Kendall
b.1844
d.1888
b. 1854
d. 1920
Minna
b. 1845
d. 1907
Charles John
b. 1847
d. 1904
Frederick William m. Rosinda Kendall
(William) b. 1849
d. 1915
b. 1852
d. 1910
Oporto
Mabel m. Herbert Foster
b. 1877
d. 1965
George Edward m. Ellen Coote
b. 1886
d. 1918
Descendants living in Canada and the United States
Oporto
Lucy Maude (1873-1958) m. Arthur Foulerton
Alice (1876- 1954) m. William Morphett Cobb
Violet (1877-1957) m. Henry Morgan Shaw
Frederick Custance (Fred) (1879-1948) m. Beatrice Emily Adam
Laura (1880-1958) m. Launcelot Vigne
Albert Douglas (1882-1971) m. Gladys Mary Royds
Richard Wilcock (1890-1962) m. Judith Mary Napier
Rosinda (1892-1960) m. George C. Fimister
Children
Aileen (a)
Geoffrey
Audrey
John
Reginald
Gerald
Violet
Enid
Wm John
Sybil (a)
Vera (b)
Auriel (c)
Beryl (d)
Muriel (e)
Ronald
Brian
Joan (a)
Frederick
Felix
Marjorie (a)
Nowell
Rosinda (a)
Gabriel (a)
Richard
Dulcie (a)
Rosinda (b)
Althea (c)
John Malcolm
Related Families
(a) J.D. Symington
(a) R.J. Robertson
(b) A. Wandschneider
(c) R.M. Cobb
(d) A.L. Hirst
(e) J.H. Poynor
(a) Leland Gilbert
Adam family (B.E.A.)
Delaforce family (")
Atkinson family ("")
(a) G.V. Constant
(a) Rexford Holmes
(a) W.W. Weyndling
(a) A.C. Hawkins
(b) G.R. Scott-Farnie
(c) Peter E. Dawson

## The Family's roots in Yorkshire

Despite extensive research by several members of the family, the earliest traceable Sellers is one George Henry (GH), born in Howsham, Yorkshire, in 1777. He had three siblings, John Harrison (named after the inventor of the chronometer which enabled ships to determine longitude at sea), Elizabeth, and another brother, Charles. John Harrison Sellers, an officer in the British Army, died at the battle of Waterloo (1815). There are no known descendants of GH's brothers or sister.

On the 18th December 1809, George Henry married Mary Tuke in the parish church of Sculcoates, she being the daughter of John Batty Tuke and Catherine Mary Epworth of Cawood. John Batty Tuke's parents were Thomas Tuke (1723-1790) and Jane Batty, the daughter of William Batty (1675-1765) of Tadcaster Hall, Tadcaster. John Batty Tuke was mayor of Beverley, a large town just north of Kingston-on-Hull, where George Henry and his wife Mary set up home.

They had four children, Catherine Mary (1810-1836), Charles John (1811-1836), Frederick William (born 10th April 1815) and a younger George Henry (1819-1857).

## The beginnings in Portugal

Having being sent to boarding school at Charterhouse, near Godalming, Surrey, Frederick William (FWS) ran away from there at the age of 15 and made his way to America. There are no records of his adventures in that country, neither about when he returned to Europe, but his comments about the Civil War and the emergence of the United States as a dominant force in the world are truly prophetic, as revealed in letters to his son many years later.

History does not record how, or when, FWS arrived in Portugal, but it was probably his family's involvement in the wine trade in England that brought him to these shores, both he and his brother, the younger George Henry, being partners in the firm of Sellers, Gladstone & Co. of Liverpool.

**F. W. Sellers, circa 1850/1855 – the first Sellers to arrive in Portugal**

Long before the rise of Napoleon, Britain had developed a taste for French wines and the ties between the British wine trade and the wine growers of Bordeaux is a matter of record. Napoleon's domination of the Continent effectively closed off all shipping ports, save those of Portugal. The British wine merchants, faced with this blockade to their business, reinforced the interest they had long held in Portuguese wine, sourcing their supplies out of Oporto. Successive French invasions of the Peninsular were intended to complete the blockade of the British Isles, however Wellesley and Beresford, the respective commanders the British and Portuguese forces, inflicted heavy losses on the French, forcing them into the long retreat that culminated at Waterloo in 1815.

The relationships between Britain and Portugal, which had long been sealed by the Treaty of Windsor (1386) and the Methuen Treaty (1704), were increasingly fortified by trading links at this time and the common enemy, France. Although several companies in the Port Wine Trade had existed since the 17th century, many more companies were established in Oporto during, or immediately after, the Peninsular War.

FWS arrived in Oporto in the late 1830s to seek supplies for his Liverpool firm, his prime interest, which was to remain the focus of his business activities in England. This notwithstanding, he became registered as a trader in Oporto, where his name appears as a sole exporter in the 1840s export statistics of Port shipments kept by the Oporto Customs House, alongside the names of well-established shipping companies and other sole traders.

However, the earliest record of establishing himself in that city appears in the Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages at the British Church of St. James – an Anglican institution built by the wine shippers at a time of great prosperity in the British community or colony, as it was then called.

That Register records FWS's marriage as being on 12th October 1841 to Anne Wilcock, the daughter of John Wilcock – also from Hull in Yorkshire. The ceremony was officiated by the Chaplain, the Reverend Edward Whitely, and witnessed by her mother Mary and her uncle John and several members of the Atkinson family. Anne´s brother, Henry, was one of the senior members of the Port shipping community and he appears in the famous painting of the assembly of the members of the British Association (better known as the Factory House – which is still, today, the British shippers guild) by Joseph James Forrester, the artist, cartographer, essayist and author, who was created Baron of Serra da Estrela by the King of Portugal, and Knight Commander of the Orders of Christ and Isabella la Católica.[3]

Anne Wilcock's mother was Mary Knowles, the sister of John Knowles, a senior partner in the Port wine shipping firm of Knowles, Proctor & Bold of Liverpool, reflecting the strong family tie with the wine trade and with Liverpool.

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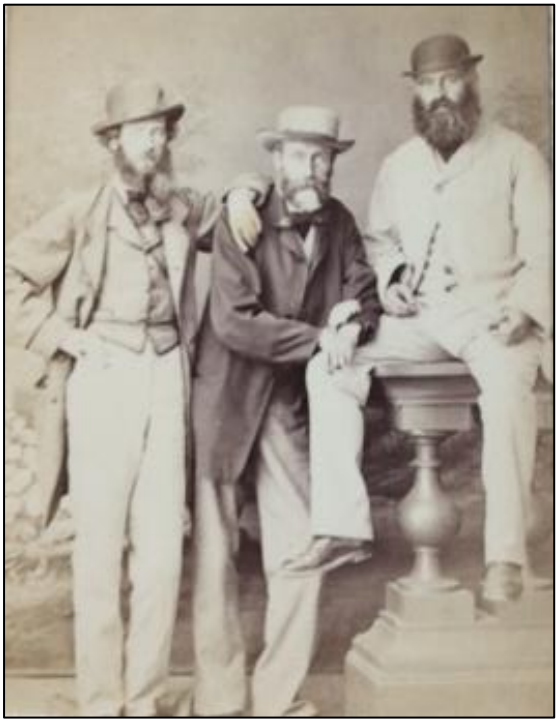
[3] See article by Andrew Shepherd, *Joseph James Forrester* in the BHSP Newsletter 8. 2020. https://www.bhsportugal.org/library/articles/joseph-james-forrester

From that marriage were born Catherine Mary (b. & d. 1843), George Henry II (1844-1888), Minna (1845-1907), Charles John (1847-1904), Frederick William II (1849-1915), Mary Elizabeth (1850-1889,) and Percy (b. & d. 1851).



**FWS and his two brothers, George Henry (l) and Charles John (r)**

Both FWS and his brother George Henry ("Uncle Harry") travelled extensively throughout Europe in search of wines for their English business in Liverpool. The volume of wine traded in London had begun to supersede the northern English trades and FWS entered into partnership with a Mr Norris. Together they set up business at the corner of Mark Lane in the City – a venture that was to occupy FWS for most of the rest of his business life. Uncle Harry, who never married, dedicated himself to wines from Italy, Hungary, and other eastern territories. He died in Beverley, Yorkshire, in 1857.

Leaving his wife and young family under the care of his brother-in-law, from the early 1850s onwards FWS travelled regularly between Oporto and London, with frequent visits to Germany and France – both being markets which had returned to becoming key suppliers to the English wine trade. He was introduced to Baron du Cluzeau de Clérans during one of his trips to southern France, who became his partner in acquiring wines from the Dordogne region for his London business.

This trade was becoming so important, that he encouraged his wife and children to join him in France. But, in this, he was roundly frustrated by her refusal and, in particular, the support that Anne received from her brother Henry, who probably regarded his brother-in-law as a wanderer and incapable of providing the settled life that his wife and family deserved.

This frustration was amply expressed in a letter to Oporto dated 12th October 1853, from LaSalle – the 14th century manor in the grounds of Chateau de Clérans, which belonged to his new partner – which had become his base in France. After a short preamble about the delays in receiving her letters and the weather, the letter continues –

> "Dearest Nancy, how I long to have you all with me these short dull days and long dull nights. I cannot forgive Henry for having prevented you from coming here last summer – and besides it will be extremely inconvenient to me to go to Oporto. – I shall have to leave my new business for months – and I know not at what loss – however I am determined that no trifle shall prevent me fetching you – though it will always be a sore point with me that you would not come by yourself when you knew how much I wished it and how much you would thereby aid me in my business upon which our dear children are dependent. Besides your excuse amounted only to this that you feared your brother´s displeasure more than your husband´s – and that you loved Henry more than you love me."

It is fairly clear from the letter that their relationship had irretrievably broken down and ends up by listing his personal and business assets which she should use to raise her young family should anything happen to him. Certainly there appear to be no further letters to Nancy, although FWS continued to write regularly to his eldest son with letters postmarked from Paris, or LaSalle. In January 1855, he writes "all the grapes in this country having been destroyed by the disease I am again, and for the third time, left without the chance of replenishing my stock – it is therefore very possible that I shall leave this part of France altogether, which I shall much regret."

Letters written later that year and in 1856 are sent from Mannheim in Germany, or from Paris. Thereafter, they are sent from his London address in Cavendish Square or from Crutched Friars, his business address. The last recorded letter to his son is dated 30th November 1863 when, as a result of some research which he had conducted into minerals mined in the Dax region of France, and which was supposed to have a very beneficial effect on vines, FWS suddenly decided to move to Valladolid in northern Spain, where he purchased a small wine estate. There he set out to transform the qualities of Castilian grapes, using his minerals. Apparently his endeavours were successful to the point that he was awarded the decoration of Isabella la Catolica, the ribbon of which he always wore in his buttonhole.

FWS He lived in Valladolid until the outbreak of a virulent plague of smallpox which coincided with the start of the Carlist War in 1872, when he was attacked and stoned in the street! He returned to Paris, where he lived near the Tuileries Garden until 1877, when he suddenly decided to go to New Zealand, in pursuit of another wine project!

FWS set out for London to prepare to travel to New Zealand and to make arrangements for the management of his London business during his absence. While staying at the Langham Hotel he suffered a sudden stroke on the eve of departure. His business partners put him into a nursing home, but he succumbed to a second stroke and died on 11th December 1877. He was buried in Highgate Cemetery, London.

## The Second Generation

Of Frederick Williams´s three sons, two of them, George Henry II (the eldest) and Frederick William II (the youngest), married two sisters – Hilda Emily and Rosinda Jane respectively.

The parents of these sisters were Samuel Joseph Kendal (1810-55) and Harriet da Piedade Custance (1824-57) of Lisbon. Harriet´s parents were Thomas Parsons Custance and Maria Eugenia Antonia Barbosa de Brito, Maria Eugenia being closely related to D. João VI (1767-1826).

George Henry II, his mother and siblings lived in Oporto, in Rua da Restauração, the long road uphill from the quayside in MiraGaia to the Santo António Hospital, that monumentally imposing building designed by John Whitehead, the then British Consul in Oporto. To this address his father sent the correspondence, which he regularly despatched, usually by vessel from London. It would have been a short walk down to the quayside to collect any post from the scheduled sailings from London or Liverpool.

Throughout the period of 1851 to 1863, FWS constantly lectured his son of the importance of languages and many of the letters are in French or Portuguese, with occasional German expressions for good measure! In December 1856 he announces that he has sent off George Hilpert´s large German Dictionary by the next vessel to Oporto for George´s further studies! He exhorts all his children to learn French thoroughly, as "it is necessary to all persons who have any pretensions to good education". He further tells George that he is designing a business for him in which the knowledge of German is absolutely necessary and "it is my duty to see that you acquire it – if not in Oporto, then next spring in Berlin with some old friends of mine"! It is interesting to note that both George and his younger brother Charley were by this time enrolled in the Rev Whiteley´s school at Entre Quintas, and that school reports were regularly sent to FWS in London.

At the age of 14, George Henry joined his Uncle Henry in Offley, Cramp & Forrester where he learned every aspect of the trade, and

although, in a letter to his father he indicated his preference for the commercial side of the business, this clearly pleased FWS, who had never disguised his wish for his eldest son to join him in his London-based business. Some years later, George moved to Cockburn Smithes & Co. before founding his own Port wine shipping firm of G. H. Sellers & Ferro, in partnership with Senhor Narcizo Ferro. The partnership of Reid & Rumsey later joined the firm and it became G. H. Sellers & Ferro, Sucrs. Lda.


**George Henry II Sellers, 1844-1888**

One of the activities of the partnership was the purchase and distribution of very strong *aguardente* – which is used for the fortification of Douro wines. Some years earlier, George had made the acquaintance of the Visconde de Chanceleiros, one of the country´s largest vineyard owners, whose quintas in the northern Ribatejo area near Torres Vedras produced great quantities of wine, which were transformed by distillation into vinous brandy or *aguardente*. George Henry contracted typhoid during a visit to the Visconde de Chanceleiros property at Cortegana, Alenquer, and died at the relatively early age of 44, on 23rd October 1888.

His widow, Hilda Emily, moved to a house in Rua Central, Leça da Palmeira, where she was supported by her sister and brother-in-law FWS II. George and Hilda had had nine children during their marriage, six of whom had died at birth or in very early infancy. Mabel and Edith were home-schooled by their mother and the only boy, George Edward

(Edward), was sent off to the Rev Whiteley´s school as soon as he was old enough. He seems to have been a bright pupil, because in 1898 his mother received a note from Clifton College in Bristol advising that he had been awarded a scholarship to study there, at the age of 12.

**George 'Edward' Sellers at Clifton College, Bristol, 1898**

The entire family then moved to Bristol and Edward entered Clifton College, where he enjoyed a very successful five years, both academically and athletically. Due to either emerging unrest over the growing fears of war with Imperial Germany, or the career opportunities on offer in Canada, Edward travelled to the west coast of Canada shortly after he graduated from Clifton. He quickly appears to have established his own business at Fort Langley in British Columbia, and was soon afterwards joined in Canada by his mother and two sisters.

The two sisters, Mabel and Edith, married Herbert Foster and Ivor Austin respectively. Mabel and Herbert had three boys: Richard in

1915, George in 1919 and Rowland in 1921. Edward married Ellen Coote, from a wealthy and well-established family in Langley, Canada. They had two daughters: Kitty, born in 1912, and Nancy, born in 1915.

**'Edward' Sellers, 1886-1918**

Prior to the outbreak of war, Edward had established and trained the "Langley Volunteers" – a group of military-minded men who formed a unit in the Spring of 1914, sensing that war was brewing in Europe. This unit later became a squadron of the 31st BC Horse, which subsequently supplied recruits to a number of Canadian battalions. Edward then joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force and served in the Canadian Corps Cyclists and the Canadian Tunnelling Corps. Tragically he was killed in action near Cambrai on 2nd September 1918, and his name appears on four different Cenotaphs: at St. James´ Church in Oporto, and at Fort Langley, Murrayville and Chilliwack (all in Canada)[4].

Edward´s mother, Hilda, and his widow, Ellen, both died in 1920. The Sellers name in Western Canada ceased to exist. However numerous relations who are descendants of his daughters and nephews live in Canada and the United States of America to this day.

[4] The author acknowledges correspondence with Mr. Warren Sommer, a Canadian Historian, author, and Museum Director, to whom he is indebted for the information and photos of George Edward Sellers and the Canadian Expeditionary Force in WW1.

***Frederick William II (William)***

On 27th September 1862 the London, Buenos Aires and River Plate Bank was incorporated, originally to operate in the Argentinian capital. Over the years, the bank expanded into other areas of Argentina, later creating branches in Uruguay, Chile and Brazil.

Another banking venture was founded in the same year – the London and Brazilian Bank, the Oporto office being located in the Rua Nova dos Inglezes directly opposite the British Association, more commonly referred to as the Factory House, which in effect was – and still is – a guild for the British port wine shippers.

It was to this branch of the Bank that William entered at the age of 19 in 1868, probably having been recruited by the incoming manager, Senhor Antonio José Silva Lima. William rose through the hierarchy and was appointed manager on 31st July 1889, at the age of 40, and presided over the destiny of the branch until his retirement in 1914, after 46 years of service to the bank.

Having acquired the South American operations of the *Banco de Londres, Buenos Aires y Rio de la Plata* five years earlier, in 1923 Lloyds Bank masterminded a merger with the separately owned London & Brazilian Bank to form the Bank of London and South America, that splendid banking institution that was so beloved by the members of the British fraternity in Lisbon and Oporto.

William and his wife Rosinda Jane had 10 children; of the boys, Fred, the eldest, married Beatrice Adam; Albert emigrated to British Columbia following his cousins where he raised a son, Nowell Albert and a daughter, Rosinda Ellen. Rosinda married Rexford Holmes and together they ran a small vineyard in the Sonoma Valley, California, in the United States of America.

**Frederick William II (William) and his wife Rosinda Jane**

The third surviving son, Richard Wilcock (Dick) followed his elder brother into the Socony-Vacuum oil organisation[5], first in Casablanca and then in Paris. He rose to be the European manager, based in London. He served in France throughout the First World War and won the M.C.

All the surviving girls married, with the exception of Ellen, who never married and died at the end of the First World War. These sisters became Maude Foulerton, Alice Cobb, Violet Shaw, Laura Vigne and Rosinda Fimister, with most of them continuing to live in Oporto after their marriages. Maude, Alice and Laura all married distinguished members of the Port wine trade.

[5] Now Mobil.

**William's youngest daughter Rosinda married George Fimister[6] in 1910**

**Standing extreme right is her father, William; her brother Frederick Custance (Fred) is standing alone in the background at the very top.**

From his office opposite the Factory House, William II must have been endlessly frustrated to see many of his relations, friends and business associates from the wine trade enjoying the use of the splendid premises for the traditional Wednesday lunches and occasional parties in a building to which he could not claim access, as it was at that time reserved for the exclusive use of the British Port shippers. Indeed, in 1825, a number of traders and members of other professions wrote to the Foreign Secretary in London, George Canning, complaining that the Port shippers had exclusively appropriated this historic and nationally important building. This met with a resounding silence from London!

Accordingly, in 1902 William hosted a meeting of 16 people at the bank premises in the Rua do Infante D. Henrique (previously Rua Nova dos Inglezes) to explore the possibility of establishing a club in the city. The following year, in May, 44 founding members, including a number of Port shippers, met and agreed to establish the Oporto British Club.

6 George & Rosinda Fimister are the grandparents of Bruce, Patrick & Peter Dawson.

In short, a seven-bedroom 18th century house in the Rua das Virtudes was identified as a suitable venue for the new Club – one of its features being a section of the City wall, which formed a part of the terrace overlooking the Douro, this Muralha having been completed in 1374 by D. Fernando. The formal opening took place in 1904, with 135 full members. The house, which was initially rented from a Snr Brandão, was finally purchased in 1923 for £2,363. The Oporto British Club remained in this location for the whole of its existence, until the O.B.C. was merged with the Oporto Cricket and Lawn Tennis Club (founded in 1855) and adopted the latter´s name in 1965, under the chairmanship of C.A. (Tony) Chambers.


**Frederick William II (William) 1862-1915**

William only lived for a short while after his retirement and died in November 1915. He is buried in the cemetery of St James', the British Church, next to his wife, who pre-deceased him in May 1910.

## The Third Generation

### *Frederick Custance Sellers (Fred)*

Born in Leça da Palmeira, in January 1879, Fred and his siblings were educated by governesses engaged by their father from England.

Fred married Beatrice Emily Adam, the daughter of Charles Robert Adam and Ellen Latimer Atkinson, at St Georges' in Hanover Square, London, on 10th September 1903. Both being from established Oporto families, it was natural that they would return home to settle in Quinta da Pena, overlooking the River Douro, where their first son, Ronald, was born in June 1904. Later, the young family took the major decision to move to Lisbon when Fred applied to work in a newly established oil trading company.

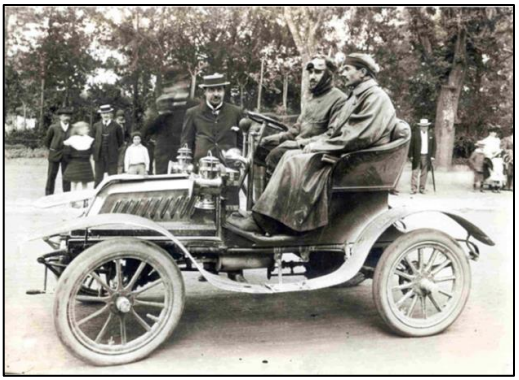
The Vacuum Oil Company had opened an office in Lisbon in 1896. Founded in 1866 by Matthew Ewing and Hiram Everest of Rochester, New York, this was the first petroleum company to be established in Portugal. Fred joined the company as Manager and oversaw its eventual growth to become the leading oil and petroleum company in Portugal.

Fred and Beatrice rented a house at Nº 20, Rua do Prior, in Lapa, which was to become their main residence for many years and was where they raised their growing family. Brian was born in 1910, Joan in 1912, and Frederick Warren in 1914.

The early years of the 20th century was a period of great turmoil and change in Portuguese society. However it was a prosperous time for the Vacuum Oil Company, as the company enjoyed an almost unlimited monopoly of the market. After a ten-year unchallenged presence, competition emerged in the shape of the Colonial Oil Company in 1905, which had warehouses at the Doca de Santo Amaro, and also the Lisbon Coal & Oil Fuel Co, which started business in 1910, to be taken over by Royal Dutch Shell ten years later. In addition, the firm of Costa e Ribeiro was founded in 1919, later to become the Atlantic Refining Company in 1929, followed by a short-lived company

set up by the Queiroz Pereira family in 1930. To maintain its dominant position in the Portuguese market, Vacuum Oil Company took over the Colonial Oil Company shortly after the latter's foundation.

The Portuguese Royal family were fascinated by motor cars, which were increasingly present in the streets of Lisbon. Indeed, the King, D. Luiz, founded the Royal Automovel Club of Portugal in 1903. The club's royal patronage had a short-lived existence, as the assassination of D. Carlos in 1910 brought an end to the monarchy. Following the proclamation of the Republic, the club was re-established in 1910/11 in the shape of the Automovel Clube de Portugal, of which Fred Sellers was a founding member. In 1913, the ACP launched the first official maps of Portuguese roads, sponsored by the Vacuum Oil Company. A 2nd edition was printed in 1929, and many remember how these very detailed maps remained the only form of road map available to motorists for many a year.



**The origins of the Automovel Clube de Portugal in 1910/11**

The success of the Vacuum Oil Company in the decades of 1910 and 1920 mirrored the growing influence of Fred in the Lisbon business community and the family's increasing prosperity. Estoril and Cascais had become popular resorts, in preference to Sintra, and, with the improvement of road and rail communications to the coast, some of Fred's friends and business colleagues migrated "down the line".

**Vila Bahia, 1914. From left: Brian, Frederick Warren with Fred, Joan[7]**

Fred rented Vila Bahia, a property in Monte Estoril, where the family increasingly spent more of their time. It was here that Fred developed his interest in race horses, culminating with his horse "Moonlight" won the Grande Prémio de Cascaes in October 1921, the trophy of which is still in the possession of the family a century later.


**Grande Prémio de Cascaes, won by Fred's horse 'Moonlight' in 1921**

[7] Clive & Evelyne Gilbert's mother. Clive was Chair of the British Historical Society.

During the course of the First World War, Fred's knowledge of and international contacts in the oil business were instrumental in creating logistical support for the refuelling of Royal Navy vessels during the conflict, for which he was awarded the OBE in recognition of his contribution to the war effort.

Portugal continued to be supplied with petroleum products by foreign companies throughout the first three decades of the 20th century, predominantly by Vacuum and Shell. This situation had become of particular concern to Dr Antonio de Oliveira Salazar during the years following his appointment as Finance Minister in April 1928 and he called on Fred Sellers to counsel him on the ways in which this reliance on foreign imports could be substituted by products refined in Portugal.

Dr Salazar was elevated to Prime Minister on 5th July 1932, and in the following year the Sociedade Nacional de Petroleos (SONAP) was formed. 60% of the shares were held by foreign investors and 40% by the Portuguese State. However, this did not change the dominance of these companies until SACOR was founded in 1937 and its new refinery at Cabo Ruivo was inaugurated on 11th November 1947.

The first four years of Dr Salazar's restructuring of the country's finances were years of certain turmoil for the family. In early 1929, Fred visited Paris on business and took the opportunity to visit the World Fair, where Rolls Royce was exhibiting its latest models; one in particular took his eye – which he bought on the spot! This was a precipitous move, for a few months later, the Wall Street Crash occurred in October 1929, an event that was to have a disastrous effect on Fred's wealth. Although living a life of luxury in Lisbon and Estoril, a significant part of his remuneration as an oil trader took the form of shares in the Vacuum Oil Company and investments on the New York Stock Exchange.

**Fred Sellers, 1914-1948**

The Crash wiped out most of the value of his holdings and the Great Depression that followed had a negative effect on world trade. Fred was forced to give up the property in Monte Estoril but continued to live at Rua do Prior, in Lapa. Things began to improve when, in 1931, Vacuum Oil merged with STANDARD OIL of New York, one of the John D. Rockefeller companies, to become SOCONY-Vacuum Oil Company (later to become MOBIL), which Fred continued to manage until his retirement in 1938 (above).

Meantime, other members of the family continued their careers with SOCONY-Vacuum: Fred's son Ronald ran the organisation's operations in West African counties from his base in Dakar, Senegal, while "Uncle" Dick Sellers was promoted to run SOCONY's European operations, moving his headquarters from Paris to Whitehall in London.

In September 1941, Dick made a rapid trip to Lisbon to discuss petroleum supply problems with the Portuguese government before a planned trip to the United States. The Economics Minister being absent from the capital, Dick requested a meeting with Dr Salazar, to no avail. However, Salazar sent an aide to meet with him, and as the record of this meeting at the Torre do Tombo confirms, in essence, Dick suggested that the Government should consider the importation of refined petroleum products through SACOR, which at that time the company was prohibited by its licence agreement from so doing. Dick further recommended the purchase of oil tankers for this purpose, adding that a number of French registered tankers were available on the market. Shortly afterwards, the Government purchased four oil tankers through the Instituto Português de Combustíveis, and the oil companies and the Portuguese State constituted SOPONATA on the 13th June 1945, as the maritime operation of SACOR, which held 50% of the capital.

On his retirement, Fred and Beatrice moved into a new apartment in Rua Rodrigues Sampaio, just off Marquês de Pombal, where he could be closer to his favourite restaurant in Lisbon where he was a regular customer, that of the Aviz Hotel on Avenida Fontes Pereira de Melo. The Aviz was inaugurated on 24th October 1933 after the spectacular

conversion of a palace built in 1904, which was owned at the time by one of Fred's friends, José Rugeroni. It was known as the most sumptuous hotel in the world and became the permanent home of Calouste Gulbenkian in April 1942, after he moved from Paris to Lisbon.

Known as "Mr 5%" from the income he personally earned from oil revenues generated in the "Red Line Agreement" countries of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, it was in the Aviz that Gulbenkian hosted a meeting of all the major oil companies in November 1948, where he agreed to cancel the Red Line Agreement, although he retained significant holdings and influence in these territories. Fred did not live to see this historic carve-up of the oil producing territories, which enabled Exxon and Mobil to enter Saudi Arabia for the first time, as he had died a few months earlier, on the 11th June, 1948.

Fred, who had come to know the two richest men in the world – as a manager for Rockefeller and a lunch companion of Gulbenkian at the Aviz – was nevertheless forced to leave his shoes at the door of his apartment when he arrived back home from lunch, as Beatrice tolerated no nonsense from him or the rest of her adult family! Beatrice outlived him by 27 years, until her death in Lisbon in August 1975, at the height of the most turbulent period of the Portuguese Revolution. She is buried with Fred in the family's plot in St George's Church cemetery, Lisbon.

Calouste Gulbenkian continued to live at the Aviz Hotel until his death in 1955. By the bequest in his will, his vast collection of art and priceless objects, which had been on loan to museums around the world to avoid them being lost during the Second World War, was gradually re-assembled and housed in Lisbon in a specially constructed museum, in 1956. His oil-based assets were transferred to the Gulbenkian Foundation, which to this day continues to provide substantial scholarships world-wide, especially to those from Portugal.

……. *to be continued*.

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*Michael Sellers was born in Glasgow, being the only male member of his family not to have been born in Portugal for 183 years – the last British-born member of his family being his great-great-grandfather (FWS), who was born in Yorkshire in 1815. Ironically none of the family has ever held Portuguese nationality, and it was only in 2020 that Michael started the process of applying for Portuguese citizenship! Michael arrived in Oporto in March 1946, and has spent all his life in Portugal, except for a period between 1955 and 1966 when he attended school in Oxford and studied to be a chartered accountant in the Midlands and London, qualifying in 1965. Based in Oporto, Michael worked in the Port wine trade for over 20 years, followed by a varied career in shipping and civil construction until moving to the Algarve in 1997 to oversee the management of a golf resort. He retired in 2009 and currently lives in Lagos.*