

## **The Sellers Family in Portugal – Part 2**

### **Frederick William Sellers (1815-1877) and his second family**

This is the second of a three-part series on the Oporto-based Sellers family, which has been in Portugal since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Part I of the story<sup>1</sup> outlined the beginnings of the family's long association with Portugal and, in particular, the exploits and achievements of the 'founding father', FWS. This part shares a lesser known episode of FWS's life. The third and final part will bring us up to the contemporary history of the fourth and fifth generations.

*By Michael Sellers*



**Frederick William Sellers (FWS), c. 1850**

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<sup>1</sup> Published in the BHSP's 47th Annual Report and Review, 2020.

## Oporto and first marriage

The Sellers History shows that FWS arrived in Oporto to establish a source of Port Wine for his family's expanding wine business in England, centred on the old established firm of Sellers & Gladstone of Liverpool but tracing its origins back to his home county of Yorkshire.

In October 1841 FWS married Anne Wilcock in St James' Church in Oporto and together they quickly raised a young family, two sons and two daughters being born between August 1843 and April 1847. The years between 1838/9 and 1847 found FWS firmly settled in the north of Portugal securing the lodges in Vila Nova de Gaia for storing and maturing the wine acquired from the farmers in the Douro Valley, having no vineyards of his own.

Once the sources of his supplies had been secured and the lodges in Gaia had been successfully established, FWS started to travel with some frequency between Oporto and his trading company in Liverpool. These journeys would always have been by sea often accompanying his own pipes<sup>2</sup> of Port to the Liverpool docks from where they would proceed directly to his firm's customers or to be bottled and held in the firm's premises. Return voyages would be accompanied by the empty wine casks known as "*Torna Viagem*".

There is little doubt that FWS was a restless soul, endlessly pursuing fresh sources of his beloved wine and always with the objective of equipping his wine trade outlets in England with an ever increasing selection of fine wines from traditional and newer wine growing areas. Leaving his wife and young family in the care of his brother-in-law Henry Wilcock, from the late 1840s onwards FWS travelled regularly between Oporto, Liverpool and London, with frequent visits to Germany and France, markets which had reestablished their importance as key suppliers to the English wine trade.

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<sup>2</sup> A cask for shipping port equal to 535 litres, or approx. 60 cases of 12 bottles.

## France

The French trade, in particular, had become very important for FWS and he commenced acquiring wines from the Dordogne region from the vineyards of Baron Bernard du Cluseau de Clérans. His determination to expand his French wine business lead him to spend increasingly more time in that country and he encouraged his wife and children to join him in France. His entreaties for her to join him were roundly rejected by Anne, strongly supported by 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<sup>3</sup>. The trade of wines from the Clerans Estate in the Vezere valley to the English market gained ever increasing importance as did the friendship between FWS and Baron Bernard when a common link to Yorkshire was discovered in the Baron's ancestor's history.

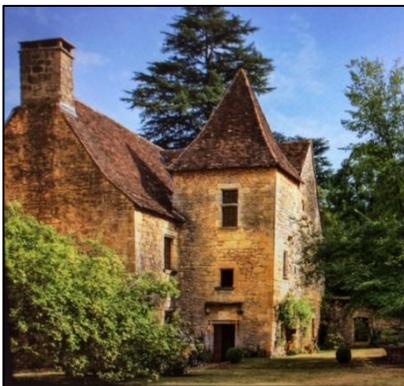
A Baron du Cluseau de Clerans was obliged to emigrate to England at the time of the French Revolution and later, being of liberal opinions, joined Lafayette to fight for the insurgents in the American Civil war. He was taken prisoner by the English and sent home in a British ship whose Captain, named Ashton, became a firm friend of his. Returned to England as a prisoner of war he visited Ashton in Uttoxeter and fell in love and married his daughter. Later, under Napoleon, he became French Consul at Hull where, by curious coincidence, his doctor was the Sellers family doctor, although he never met the Sellers family.

Later, the Baron returned to Clerans with his three sons to find that the family estate at Saint-Léon-sur-Vézère had become a wilderness, as Napoleon had denuded the country of labour for his armies. Bernard, the eldest son, loved the estate and spent all his fortune in restoring it; he married and had a daughter and sought out a good marriage for her in the shape of the Marquis de Saint-Aurans who was a very smart young officer in charge of Napoleon's Army Stud farm. Unfortunately, the Marquis demanded a dowry, which the Baron could not provide.

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<sup>3</sup> See BHSP's 47<sup>th</sup> Annual Report, 2020, "The Sellers Family in Portugal", Page 75.

However, a brother of his, who had made two successive good marriages and become wealthy in consequence, came to the rescue by buying the Clerans estate from Bernard and presenting it to his daughter as her dowry. Thereafter Monsieur le Marquis and Madame lived at the Chateau and apparently allowed Baron Bernard to live in the Manoir de la Salle, which was part of the estate, where his wife lived to a great age.



**Manoir de la Salle, Clerans Estate**

## **Second ‘marriage’**

Baron Bernard had another daughter who went off on a voyage to Italy, as a sort of finishing education, together with a companion as chaperone. There she met a Mr Oates who was British Consul in Naples, fell in love and married him. They lived together for a few years



**Bernard du Cluseau de Clérans**

until Mr Oates died and she was left with some means of her own, a small pension from the British Government and two children, Anne and Charles. She returned to the ancestral home and lived at Manoir de la Salle with the old Baron and her children. It was there that FWS met the very beautiful Miss Anne Oates in about 1855 or 1856, fell in love, and apparently eloped with her, first on the Continent, but soon to London, owing to the failure of the grape harvests in France due to the phylloxera vine disease.

It was rumoured that some marriage ceremony took place in Strasbourg Cathedral, but no evidence of such has ever surfaced. A first daughter by name Rosalie was born to them in 1857 but died in infancy and by the time their second daughter, Eugenie, was born in 1860 they were settled in Chapel Street, Cavendish Square in London. Business must have been bad about 1863/4 because they moved to a less expensive address in Colville Street, Bayswater.

## **Spain**

Then FWS, ever restless, resolved to follow up on an earlier project. Sometime during his wanderings he had investigated the virtues of some mineral salt mined in the Dax district of France, which was supposed to be particularly valuable as a chemical fertilizer for vines. He bought a small wine estate in Valladolid in Spain and set out, with his salts, to transform the qualities of Castilian grapes to enable them to be transformed into Sherry! Apparently he succeeded so far as to be awarded the decoration of Isabella la Catolica, the ribbon of which he always wore in his buttonhole. On the way to Valladolid in 1868, they stopped at an inn at St Jean de Luz and that night Charlotte (later Mrs Leigh Smith) was born. The young family lived at Valladolid and then tragedy struck when Anne Oates died in 1871 of virulent smallpox, of which there was a plague in the city. The Carlist War started less than a year later and when he and his eldest daughter Eugenie were stoned in the street, FWS decided to leave Spain in 1872.

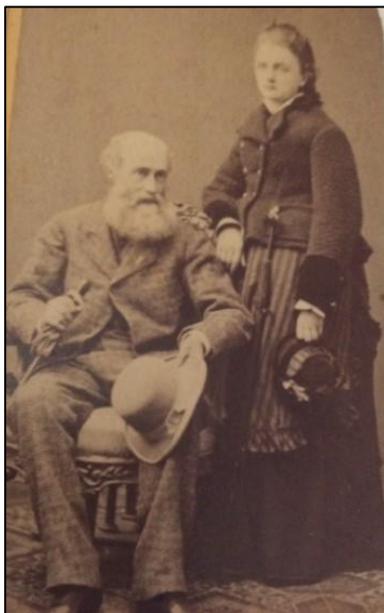
## **Paris**

He returned to France with his young daughters aged twelve and four, but this time to Paris. The bereaved family arrived one year after the Commune (1871) and took an apartment complete with a governess for Eugenie and a nurse, Celine, for Charlotte. They changed apartment three times during this period and although the girls adored their father and he them, they saw many exhibitions of his most ungovernable temper. There followed a move to Dourdan near Paris.

In 1877, FWS suddenly informed the girls that he had decided to take the family to New Zealand. They went to England to prepare for the journey and paid a visit to friends, by name Belcher, who lived near Liverpool. Belcher was an old acquaintance who had visited them in Valladolid and, according to Charlotte's nurse, had had a heated quarrel with FWS having discovered from some source or other that FWS had another family living in Portugal. He called him an unscrupulous blackguard, to which FWS retorted that the “previous marriage” was no marriage owing to some technicality or other. After the Belchers, they returned to London and stayed at the Langham Hotel. The day before they sailed, the girls went out to do some last minute shopping and on returning to the hotel were informed that their father had had a stroke.

### **Illness and demise**

Belcher, who had been appointed the girls’ warden in case of his death, arrived from Liverpool and put FWS into a nursing home, where Eugenie kept him company during his illness, while Charlotte, aged nine, was sent off to stay with a relative, Mrs Edward Oates, who lived at “Coppins” in Iver, Berkshire, later home of the Duchess of Kent. FWS had a second stroke and the relatives at Chateau Lasalle wrote and demanded that Charlotte be sent to them, as it was obvious that FWS would not live, so she went and lived at Lasalle with Grannie and Great Grandmother



**FWS and Eugenie, c. 1876**

until, aged 15, she returned to England. Frederick William Sellers died on 11<sup>th</sup> December 1877 and was buried in Highgate Cemetery, London.

## **Eugenie Sellers Strong**

Eugenie was left stranded in London, FWS having left the girls about £800 between the two of them. She entered Girton College, Cambridge, in the Michaelmas term of 1879, partly paying her tuition fees with the money from his estate and partly with the help of an anonymous benefactor, whom the family suspected was a member of the Sellers family, probably Charles Sellers, the author of “Oporto Old & New”, who lived in London at that time. Miss Katherine Jex-Blake, who was later to play a distinguished role as Mistress of Girton, was a student of the same age and of the same college year as Eugenie. She commented many years later how Miss Sellers made an immediate impression on the others gathered in the College. The 19 year old student had not had an ordinary growing up, having spent many years in Spain and France, which was very different from the background of the other students.

Eugenie had lived until she was 12 years old in Valladolid, the city of old Castile known as the capital of its kings, the marriage place of the ‘Reis Catolicos’ Ferdinand and Isabella. There she received lessons from a Jesuit father and was steeped in the Roman Catholic religion of her mother, Anne Oates. Her father, although hailing from a Protestant family in Yorkshire, was happy for her to be brought up in the Catholic faith. Following her mother’s death and burial in Valladolid in 1871, the family moved to France where she attended the school of the Sisters of St. Paul in Dourdan, remaining at that convent for several years before moving to London. Her education was complemented by accompanying her restless father on his travels in Spain and Greece and on the holidays spent with family in Italy and Sicily. It was this love of her childhood and growing up in Latin lands that inevitably steered her in the direction of university and scholarly research. At Cambridge she chose to study Classics, inspired by the knowledge of antiquity already instilled in her from her travels in Greece and Italy. Eugenie sat her final Tripos examinations on the same conditions as other students, as the law permitting women to sit for examinations had just been passed, in February, 1881. She graduated with a Third Class degree in 1882

After teaching briefly at St. Leonard's School in Scotland, Eugenie moved to London to pursue classical archaeology under the scholarship of Sir Charles Newton of the British Museum where she met and associated with the major British artists of the era: Frederic, Lord Leighton and Edward Burne Jones. She taught university extension courses in the 1890-91 academic year and lectured on Greek art at the British Museum. The following year she entered the British School in Athens, its first female student. From 1892 to 1896 Eugenie published a series of translations of works by renowned German archaeologists and continued her studies in Munich, later publishing her "Masterpieces of Greek Sculpture" in 1895 and "The Elder Pliny's Chapters on the History of Art", which were translated by Jex-Blake, her former colleague at Girton College.



**Eugenie, before her marriage in 1897**

In 1897 Eugenie married Sandford Arthur Strong, the art historian and librarian at Chatsworth House, the seat of the Duke of Devonshire. However, after only six years of marriage, her husband died in 1904 and she was appointed his successor as librarian at Chatsworth.

Eugenie by now had become a firm Romanist and in 1907 she published “Roman Sculpture from Augustus to Constantine”, which was to become her most important book, on the strength of which she was appointed Assistant Director of the British School at Rome in 1909. As Assistant Director she contributed greatly to the School’s reputation through the delivery of important talks, including the Charles Eliot Norton lectures of the Archaeological Institute of America at the Institute’s centres at various universities and in the Lecture Hall of the Metropolitan Museum of New York. Eugenie also delivered the Rhind lectures in Edinburgh. Girton College awarded her a life research fellowship in 1910 and she continued to publish works on Roman architecture and sculptures throughout her career at the British School in Rome until the School’s Board in England terminated the appointments of both the Director, Thomas Ashby, and Eugenie as Assistant Director in 1925, following a dispute between the two which had become more pronounced with the passage of time.

Returning to London, Eugenie was the guest of honour at a dinner at the Hotel Cecil on 14<sup>th</sup> July, where the guests were a cross-section of men and women who retained the tradition of doing honour to scholarship. The Chairman, Lord Oxford and Asquith, praised the depth and range of Mrs Strong’s interests and how she had taken all Western archaeology for her province. This was further emphasised by the following speaker, Lord Rennell Rodd, the former British Ambassador to Rome and one of Eugenie’s closest life-long friends. Eugenie Sellers Strong was appointed CBE by King George V in 1927.

Eugenie had always had in mind a project to found an educational establishment to be run on her own lines, and with this idea she returned to Rome to pursue that intention. The school was never established, however from her apartment on the Via Balbo, Eugenie continued to

preside over meetings of her many friends living in Rome and to deliver lectures to students, young and old, who sought her out for her immense knowledge of all things Ancient and Roman.

As the clouds gathered in 1938 and the relationship deteriorated between the two countries she most loved and admired, Eugenie was drawn towards the imperialistic and dictatorial theories of Mussolini, largely because of his archaeological policies, as he was a believer in the glories of Ancient Rome. Regrettably, this support for Mussolini and fascism was to tarnish her reputation and discredit much of her published works. Many years were to pass before the true immensity of her 45 years of scholarly learning were to come to the fore once again.

Eugenie Sellers Strong died in Rome on 16<sup>th</sup> September 1943 comforted by the rites of the Roman Catholic Church and was buried at the Campo Verano cemetery. Her collected works and publications are deposited at Girton College, Cambridge.

### **Charlotte Sellers Leigh-Smith**

The story of Eugenie's remarkable life would not be complete without mention of her younger sister, Charlotte Annette. Following her father's death in 1877, Charlotte returned to England from France in 1883, aged 15, shortly after Eugenie had graduated from Cambridge University. Within a few years of her return, she married Benjamin Leigh-Smith, nearly 40 years her senior. In his book "Eugenie Sellers Strong – Portrait of an Archaeologist", Stephen L. Dyson, Park Professor of Classics at the University of Buffalo in New York State, states that Charlotte met her future husband at Scalands, near Hastings when accompanying Eugenie and Barbara Leigh-Smith (Bodichon), Benjamin's sister, on a visit to the family's country estate.

The Leigh-Smiths were a remarkable family hailing, as did the Sellers, from Hull in Yorkshire, where their ancestor, William Smith (1756-1835) was born. He was a liberal Whig MP and a supporter of a number of reform causes, including the abolition of slavery, being one

of William Wilberforce's earliest associates. William Smith and his wife, Frances Coape, had 11 children. Their daughters, Joanna Maria and Frances married into the Bonham-Carter and Nightingale families respectively. Their son, Benjamin Smith (1793-1860) was also born in Hull. He studied at Trinity College, Cambridge, and after graduating he made a considerable fortune as the owner of a distillery and later followed his father's footsteps to become a MP in 1838, holding his seat until 1847. He remained a bachelor until the age of 40, when he met Ann Longden, a milliner's apprentice, and with whom he was to cohabit without marrying until her death in 1834 at Ryde, in the Isle of Wight. Changing his name from Smith to Leigh-Smith, they had five children.

One of their daughters, Barbara (1827-1891), the co-founder of Girton College, Cambridge, was a famous suffragette, a fighter for women's causes, and an accomplished painter. She married Dr Eugene Bodichon, an eminent French physician, and they lived in Algiers for many years. Throughout her life she felt tainted by the illegitimacy of her birth, a circumstance she shared with Eugenie Sellers, her fellow Girton undergraduate. Her brother, Benjamin (1828-1913) was a successful barrister in London, specializing in the defence of women's rights as befitted the tradition of his family.

He was, however, irresistibly drawn to polar exploration and undertook five voyages to try and reach the North Pole. Expeditions in 1871/72 to unexplored areas north of Spitzbergen led to the discovery of a current of warmer water and his belief that he could find a way across the Arctic through the Barents Sea. Convinced that his theory could be proven, Benjamin commissioned a wooden-hulled ice-breaker from the Stephen and Forbes yard at Peterhead at his own expense. Christened the "Eira", she was a 240 ton barquentine equipped with a 50 horse power engine and 130 feet overall. On completion, the Eira sailed on her first Arctic venture in 1880. On 14<sup>th</sup> June 1881, Benjamin and a crew of 25 set sail to venture deeper into areas further north than those explored in the previous year. Two months later, the Eira became trapped between two icebergs off Cape Flora in Franz-Joseph land and

sank in two hours.<sup>4</sup> The crew were able to salvage much of the stores and equipment which proved invaluable for their survival in the brutal polar winter and built a shelter with wood from the wreck. Thanks to Benjamin's discipline, all his men survived the many months of freezing darkness and, using the salvaged lifeboats they rowed to the shores of Nova Zemlya in the late spring of 1882, where they met up with the three ships sent to find them by the Royal Geographic Society.

Benjamin's maritime and overland expeditions and his recording of local phenomena were universally acclaimed by the world's leading scientists. His records were handed over to the Royal Geographic Society and continue to provide invaluable information to this day for research into global warming. By Royal recognition, Cape Leigh-Smith was named after him, and other locations in Spitzbergen and Franz-Joseph Land are named after his family and members of his crew. Retiring from his Arctic adventures after the loss of the *Eira*, Benjamin married Charlotte and settled down to a quiet life at Scalands. The following year Charlotte gave birth to their first child, predictably christened Benjamin, but known by his second name, Valentine. Four years later, a second son Philip was born, in 1892.



**Charlotte with Benjamin (right) and Philip (left)**

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<sup>4</sup> In 2018, a team of Russian divers discovered the wreck of the *Eira* in relatively shallow waters off Franz-Joseph Land. Apparently intact, plans are in hand to raise the wreck.



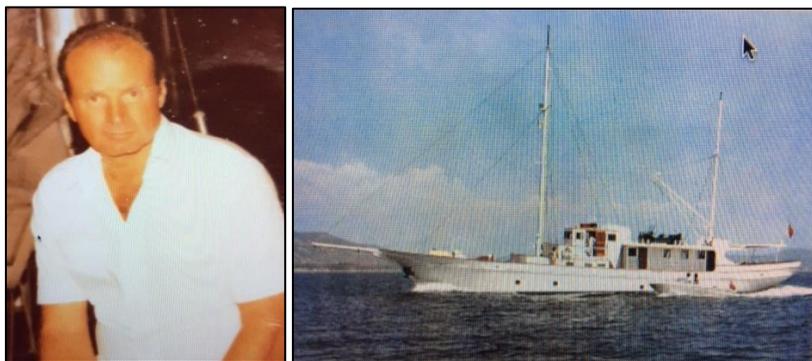
**Benjamin Leigh-Smith and Charlotte, c. 1890**

Valentine joined the Royal Navy and was an accomplished musician and composer. He never married, and after the War he retired to Switzerland, where he lived in great comfort until he died in 1963.

Philip was a scholar at Eton and served in the British Intelligence Corps during the 1914-18 War. He spoke fluent Russian, as well as French and German and took part in several British Relief Missions to Russia during the Bolshevik revolution. At the end of the War he joined the Foreign Office and was posted to a number of European capitals, including Rome and Bern, where he was Chargé d’Affaires. Writing under the name of Christopher Rover, he was the author of several books, with two of his novels “Pandemonium” and “the Red Horse” being set in the Russia of that time, which won him great acclaim.

In 1933 Philip married Dr Alice Prebil, born in Karlov, Croatia on 11<sup>th</sup> September 1907, the first British woman to receive a PhD in Nuclear Physics and the discoverer of Element 85 (now known as astatine) and a close associate of the Nobel Prize winner Irene Joliot

Curie, daughter of Marie Curie, under whom Alice had studied at the Radium Institute in Paris in 1932. Philip and Alice Leigh-Smith had an only son, Christopher, born in London in 1936. Following a career in the Royal Navy, Christopher lived for a number of years on the Cote d’Azur on board his yacht, MY Contessa d’Azur, before moving to Chateau d’Oex in Switzerland. He dedicated his life to the promotion of meat substitutes as an alternative to the slaughter of animals for food and to the study of global warming. Christopher died in 2018 after a long illness. His partner, Marie-France Le Fel, with whom he had no children, continues to live in Chateau d’Oex and corresponds regularly with the author. With his death, the Leigh-Smith line became extinct.



**Christopher Leigh-Smith and his yacht, MY Contessa d’Azur**

Benjamin, the Arctic explorer, died in Hampstead, London, on 4<sup>th</sup> January 1913. Charlotte out-lived him by 42 years until her death in London on 15<sup>th</sup> March 1955. In a eulogy at her funeral, the Very Rev. Edward Myers, Coadjutor Archbishop of Westminster, wrote:

*“Charlotte Leigh-Smith, who died recently at the age of 87, was closely connected by family ties with three of the most distinguished English women of the past hundred years; her sister Eugenie Strong, for so long co-director of the British School of Archaeology in Rome, where up to the entry of Italy into the war she was equally known for her eclectic salon; her sister-in-law, Barbara Bodichon, the water-colourist, champion*

*of women's rights and one of the founders of Girton College at Cambridge; and finally her first-cousin-in-law, Florence Nightingale. Foundress of St. Joseph's & St. Nicholas' Home for Mothers & Babies and one of the initiators of the Society of St. John Chrysostom, she combined the learning of Eugenie, the humanity of Barbara, and the intellect of Florence."*

The two branches of Frederick William Sellers' families never met, nor did they have any contact with each other until after the Second World War when, through an introduction by the Hon. Gerald Wellesley, later the Duke of Wellington, Richard Douglas Sellers<sup>5</sup> encountered Charlotte in late April 1949, when she was staying at St. James' Court, Buckingham Gate. It was here that they recounted, for the first time, the stories of their respective families.

..... *to be continued.*

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Douglas Sellers – See the 47<sup>th</sup> BHSP Annual Report, 2020, “The Sellers Family in Portugal”, Page 89.

*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. 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’<sup>6</sup> in 1899. 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 is now retired near Lagos.*

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<sup>6</sup> ‘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.