

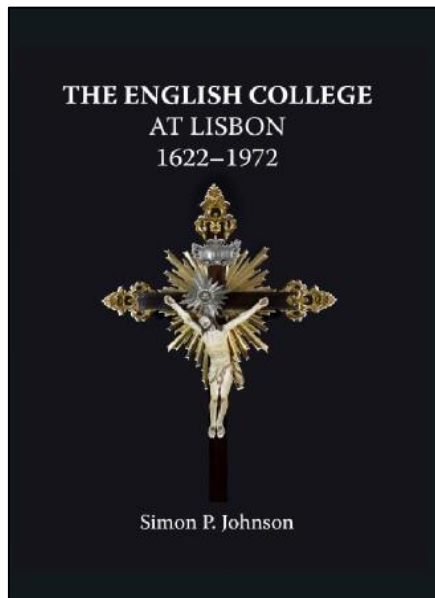
## **Book Review - ‘The English College at Lisbon, 1622-1972’**

**By Simon P. Johnson (with a foreword by Dom Duarte,  
Duke of Bragança)<sup>1</sup>**

HB, 222 pp, numerous b/w maps, photos and prints. Helion and Co, 2014.  
ISBN 978-1-909982-20-8

*Review by Kevin J. Hartley*

*The English College at Lisbon 1622-1972* by Dr. Simon Johnson, Director of Heritage at Downside Abbey, tells a fascinating story of an English foundation in the farthest south-west corner of Europe that survived from a time of draconian persecution of English Catholics to the latter half of the last century.



**The cover of the book**

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<sup>1</sup> Gracewing, 224pp. ISBN-978 085244 701 7

The College of Saints Peter and Paul in Lisbon was a latecomer to the scene of the Catholic response to the religious Reformation in England. The college at Douai, in what was then Spanish Flanders, had begun in 1568 as a response to the banning of Catholics from the universities of Oxford and Cambridge but soon became the training ground for young Englishmen ardent for ordination to the priesthood and a return to their home country and, in many cases, a frightful death. From then on there was a proliferation of such colleges, in France and Spain and in Rome, where a medieval hospice for English pilgrims found itself transformed into a power house for priestly formation. Jesuit influence was all-pervasive at the time, when there was a lively expectation of England being returned, one way or another, to the traditional religious faith. If that day came, the logic ran, there would be need of priests to fill the places vacated by Protestant clergy.

By the beginning of the seventeenth century expectations had changed. The Penal Laws were still in force, still applied, but less vigorously. The need now turned rather to the maintenance of the Catholic remnant in England and the conversion of individual souls rather than a mass return to Catholic faith and practices. For many years the Jesuit church of São Roque in Lisbon's Chiado district had sheltered a small community of exiled English priests. It might have been transformed into yet another college for priestly formation under Jesuit guidance had it not been for the involvement of a former military commander and Anglophile aristocrat, Dom Pedro Coutinho, whose antagonism towards the Jesuits inspired him to fund a college to be run entirely by the English secular clergy.

It took until 1622 to obtain both Spanish approval (Portugal at that time being under the Hapsburg Spanish monarchy) and that of Rome to create the legal entity to be known as the College of Saints Peter and Paul. Coutinho's own property in the Bairro Alto would be the site for the venture but a tortuous process of obtaining staff and students from existing establishments meant that it was only at the very end of 1628 that the first students and their professors arrived. The first president,

Joseph Haynes, former alumnus of Douai and seasoned priest of the English mission, worn out by years of travelling between England, Madrid, Rome, and Lisbon, died within a month of the inaugural celebrations. Not an auspicious introduction.

The ensuing history of the English College in Lisbon could be summed up as a perpetual see-saw between penury and sometimes glamorous royal recognition, as well as the occasional threat of closure - as at the time of the French occupation of Lisbon and during the two World Wars. Despite Coutinho's enthusiasm he was reluctant to release funds and the promised royal contribution was either very late or non-existent. However, the decision by Thomas White (aka Blacklow) to accept young teenagers (for what today we would call secondary education), although much resented by Coutinho, in the end proved a life saver, which survived until the beginning of the Second World War. Parents would pay to send their youngsters all the way to Lisbon for a good Catholic education, and many of them stayed on to become priests.

The proposed marriage of Princess Catherine of Braganza to the newly restored King Charles II thrust the college to the top of the international diplomatic scene. Richard Russell, who had originally entered the college as a servant, became a chief negotiator in the intricate manoeuvres and was rewarded by the Portuguese Crown with a bishopric. He ended up as the well-regarded bishop of Viseu. Another professor took on the role of secretary to the new Queen, and the college continued to be a useful informal conduit between the governments of Portugal and Britain. In the following century another college professor served as secretary to Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo, Portuguese Ambassador to England, who later, as Marquis de Pombal, became the effective and at times ruthless ruler of the country after the 1755 earthquake.

At times of severe anti-clericalism in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the college became a refuge for Lisbon people wishing to preserve their Catholic practices. In the early and often chaotic days of the Republic the college and its students sheltered under their British identity to flout the laws relating to the public display of religious dress, wearing a miniature union flag on their distinctive college habit. It was probably about this time that the flying of the White Ensign whenever Royal Navy ships were in harbour was originated, as a sign that the college buildings were British property (the distinct origins are lost in mystery but were acknowledge by Queen Elizabeth II on her state visit to Portugal in 1968).

The twentieth century saw two declines, two revivals and the ultimate demise of an institution that had served the Catholic population of England and Wales and had done some service to the larger community for three and a half centuries. The consequences of the two World Wars had forced temporary closures but from 1948, when ex-servicemen formed the nucleus of the student population, the college experienced a dramatic but short-lived revival. By 1962 it had a full complement of students: young men fresh from school rubbed shoulders with veterans of the Army, Navy, and Air Force; former electricians studied alongside former teachers. The centuries-old culture of the Iberian Peninsula was open for their exploration at holiday time, vistas denied to the average English person at that time. Ten years later the last students packed their bags and were relocated to seminaries in England.

Perceptions of what was desirable in priestly formation were changing. The Lisbon College had been founded to serve the Catholic population of the whole of England and Wales but now bishops had been established and wanted their own seminaries. They were reluctant to release staff and send students all the way to Lisbon merely to support centuries-old tradition.

In 1972 the last handful of students returned to complete their education in England. *O colégio dos Inglesinhos* had served its purpose. The name still echoes: *Travessa dos Inglesinhos* in the Bairro Alto, *Quinta dos Inglesinhos* in Luz, Carnide, where the college had a summer retreat, and another *Quinta dos Inglesinhos* across the river in Pêra de Baixa, where a former summer retreat is now home to the APPACDM, caring for mentally handicapped young people.

The college is now a private condominium. The chapel still maintains its original façade.



**Travessa dos Inglesinhos, 46. 1200-295 Lisboa**

### **Postscript**

The college had survived the War years, but had been forced to close in 1945. A couple of years later, James Sullivan managed to get the school reopened and gradually built up a full house (fifty or so). The first arrivals were mostly ex-servicemen, but gradually the intake became very varied – everything from teenagers fresh out of secondary school to former teachers, engineers, and journalists.

*Kevin J. Hartley was born in 1938 in Cheadle. He was a student at the English College in Lisbon for six years, from 1956 to 1962 and welcomed the opportunity to explore the Iberian Peninsula when tourism was still in its infancy. He has precious memories of a vanished world in Lisbon, such as the cries of the knife-grinder and, in season, “Quem quere figos, quem quere almoçar?” in the Bairro Alto. He remembers the creak of the ox-cart and the groan of the nora, a water wheel of buckets used for irrigation, heard while at the College’s summer house at Luz, and remembers the grain being winnowed in the ancient fashion. After ordination he returned to England. Five years later he volunteered for five years work in Rwanda. Back in England, he decided to leave the active ministry to marry. This year he and his wife celebrate their fiftieth anniversary.*