

The Church of Our Lady of the Assumption and St Gregory, Soho honours the Portuguese who fell in WWI

By Malcolm Howe, GCMW

The Church of Our Lady of the Assumption and St Gregory, Soho, in the centre of London, was re built in 1788-90 on the site of a Roman Catholic chapel within the confines of a foreign legation, hence with diplomatic immunity, but was pillaged in the Protestant Gordon Riots of 1780. It was then a chapel attached to the residence of the Bavarian envoy, Count Hasling. The fine house was built in 1685 in Golden Square and it used to be the residence of the Portuguese envoy from 1724 to 1747 - Dom Sebastião de Carvalho e Melo (1699-1782), later ennobled with the title of Marquês de Pombal.



A Solemn Requiem Mass for the Portuguese who fell in WWI

The connection of the church with Portugal was renewed in 2016 under the aegis of the Portuguese Ambassador His Excellency Senhor João de Vallera and the Anglo-Portuguese Society. A concert was performed by the Anglo-Portuguese Ensemble on Portugal's national day, followed by a Solemn Requiem Mass for the fallen, to mark the centenary of Portugal entering 1st World War joining the Allies in 1916.

150,000 Portuguese soldiers were mobilised and some 56,000 were sent to France, transported in ships of the Royal Navy, equipped with British made uniforms, boots, helmets and munitions. About 2,100 died on the Western Front, 5,200 were wounded and 7,000 taken prisoner. Overall there were some 40,000 casualties with 12,000 dead and 6,000 reported missing. The memorial window shown to the right was placed in the Sergeants' School in Águeda near Coimbra, with these words of Camões¹:



*Defendei as nossas terras que a esperança
da liberdade está na nossa lança*

*Defend our lands for in our lance is the
hope of liberty.*

— ooOOoo —

Malcolm Howe, GCMW, is the author of the following books relating to the history of Portugal: The Braganza Story: a visit to the Royal Pantheon of Portugal (1999); Portugal's Perplexing Panels: the meaning of a medieval masterpiece (2001); Dom Manuel II The last King of Portugal, His Life and Reign (2009). He has contributed 14 articles to the Society's Annual Report.

¹ Photograph by Coronel Armando Canêlhas, translation by George Lind-Guimarães