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The Anglo-Portuguese Alliance and the English Merchants in Portugal, 1654-1810

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The intertwined histories of England and Portugal are of special interest to our Society; one of the key drivers of the relationship has been trade, and in particular the establishment on Portuguese soil of English merchants, who have fared well or ill but who have made a distinctive and often colourful contribution to our association.

Maureen Shaw's book takes as its main theme the treaty signed in 1654 between the 'Republic of England and the most Serene King of Portugal' (D. João IV, the restored king of Portugal, whose daughter was later to marry the restored king of England, so adding a political dimension to the economic implications of Anglo-Portuguese relations in the seventeenth century). Austerely Protestant Cromwellian England and its newly resurgent ally Catholic Portugal declare in the treaty, signed in Westminster on 10 July 1654 by João de Sá e Meneses, Conde de Penaguião for Portugal, that there shall be 'a good true and firm peace' between them, and that their 'people and subjects shall behave to each other with favour and assistance, mutual love and honest affection'.

The argument of this book is that the 1654 treaty set out the terms under which English merchants would operate in Portugal, but that the Portuguese did relatively little to enforce its provisions, due partly to religious animosity (but this continued even after the Restoration of the English pro-Catholic King and the arrival of England's only Portuguese queen), partly to a feeling that the treaty's drafting unduly favoured the English merchants. Things passed from bad to worse with the arrival on the scene in the middle of the 18th century of one Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo, better known to posterity as the Marquês de Pombal. Despite (or indeed, as Dr Shaw points out, perhaps because of) having been Portugal's ambassador in London, Pombal adopted a strongly anti-English trade

policy, and put as many obstacles as possible in the way of English merchants as slowly but surely he grabbed back control into Portuguese hands of what were then the 'commanding heights' of the Portuguese economy, in the momentous decade of the 1750s, by, among other devices, the creation of monopoly companies to control trade. Pombal – the tercentenary of whose birth is celebrated this year – emerges rather as the villain in the piece, although the English merchants in Portugal faced pressures from all sides including the practice of some Portuguese noble families of kidnapping English children and bringing them up as Catholics. The fact that the Portuguese authorities, in 1720 during the reign of D. João V, condoned, despite a petition of protest from the English factory in Lisbon, and pressure at the highest levels, the right of families to keep children thus sequestered (the famous case of the Belangé child) goes some way to explain why, as Dr Shaw puts it 'the British in Portugal at that time tried to keep themselves apart as a community'.

The 1654 treaty's provisions seem to have been powerless against a background of slow legal decisions favouring Portuguese merchants, stultifying bureaucratic procedures slanted to penalise the English, arbitrary rulings on tariffs and taxes, and a climate of religious hostility driven by the Portuguese Inquisition, whose relationship with the Portuguese crown and whose involvement in the daily lives of English merchants caused much confusion, ill-will and basic fear among the overwhelmingly (but not totally) Protestant community. It seems almost that the merchants prospered despite the best efforts of their Portuguese hosts to achieve the opposite! Nonetheless survive they did, in a century and a half of relatively little peace; indeed, it was only after the independence of Brazil that the English merchant community in Lisbon began to lose its influence in the economy, the focus on English trade in Portugal (as opposed to in Brazil) shifting to Porto. The Brazil trade itself, or rather Portuguese efforts to channel goods through Portugal and in Portuguese ships to the detriment of outside merchants, was to be a thorn in relations between England and Portugal for much of the period covered in this book.

Dr Shaw sets the 1654 treaty in a suitable context, and then paints a detailed picture of the pattern and nature of Anglo-Portuguese trade and relations for the next 150 years (until the Portuguese court was evacuated to Brazil). The 150 years encompassed in its title are an uneasy period in the alliance; from a trade perspective, England's hold on Portugal trade fell away, to be replaced by a strong position in the newly independent and flourishing Brazil.

She provides a wealth of information on the often fraught relationships within the British merchant colony, in particular the role of the consul, appointed not by London but by the merchants themselves and paid on a scale of various commissions on trade dealings. The challenge of securing fair dealing and the disputatious interpretations put by English and Portuguese merchants, and the complexity – if not impossibility – of securing legal redress for apparent violations of the 1654 treaty's clauses made the consul in Lisbon's lot a far from happy one. Nor does the English community in the Lisbon of the time appear to have been harmonious within its own walls, as evidenced by the violent public quarrel in 1727 between the envoy, a Brigadier Dormer, and the consul, Thomas Burnet, resulting in the beating up of the consul by the envoy's footmen, and the eventual recall in disgrace of the envoy.

The narrative is fuelled by copious and extensive first hand research in both England and Portugal. In addition to the more obvious sources such as the Public Record Office in London and the Arquivo do Torre do Tombo in Lisbon, Dr Shaw has drawn on the papers of the English College in Lisbon (the fondly recalled Inglesinhos) and private archives including the British Hospital committee book, which is in our own Society library in St. Julian's. There is also an extensive bibliography of published material.

This is a book of meticulous scholarship, but not the most accessible for a general reader. The vignettes and anecdotes, however, enrich the overall narrative, and will be well appreciated by readers in our Society. Dr Shaw's book offers a highly interesting perspective on Anglo-Portuguese trade, which has been one of the constants in an alliance characterised often by uncertainty and ambiguity. It is also

remarkably – but not totally – free from errors in Portuguese, although the map (which adds relatively little, except curiously to show the location of the tiny Algarve village of Ameixial, whose role in this narrative appears to be absolutely zero!) seems to have been drawn by cartographers unaware of the use of accents and the cedilla in written Portuguese, and who delight in calling Lisbon's river the Tajo. These are small blemishes, however, to an otherwise very sound scholarly achievement.

Colin O'Halloran

(Members may wish to note that Dr Shaw has kindly donated a copy of the book to the Society's library)

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