

Annual Lunch, 12 February 2022

Talk by Carol Rankin on

“British Connections in Lisbon, 1850s to the Early 20th Century: Personages, Professions, Places and Pastimes”.

Carol is well-qualified to give such a talk as her ancestors on both sides of her family have been in Portugal for many generations. In 1855 the firm William Rankin & Son was founded in Glasgow and listed as “cork manufacturers and wholesale packing agents”. In that year William sent his eldest son, Robert, to Portugal to buy cork. Robert wrote diaries of the trip and of others in 1869 and 1873, which still exist and make fascinating reading. In 1855 he arrived in Lisbon and stayed in Street’s Hotel for seven days, there being only a few decent hotels in Lisbon. He left Lisbon on 13 February for a journey that would take him through Setúbal to Comporta by boat, surrounded by sailors where he dared not sleep for fear of being robbed of his cash. He continued south to the Algarve on a journey full of uncomfortable inns, inedible food, untrustworthy companions, and stubborn mules. Pioneering stuff, but he would not have been alone in making these kinds of journeys in his quest for cork. There were four British families who were dominant in this industry in the second half of the 19th and early 20th century – a group known as the “3 Rs” - Robinsons, Reynolds and Rankins - and the Bucknalls. Only the Reynolds and Rankins still exist in Portugal.

William Rankin’s second son, Cunison Deans Rankin, visited Portugal for the first time in late 1861 and early 1862. He, too, kept a detailed diary. He left Glasgow on 21st December and arrived in Lisbon on 29th December, a voyage of 8 days. It was a harrowing experience. Such voyages were not to be undertaken lightly; the voyage in one of the early steamships could take between four and eight days, in perilous seas. There are many accounts of vessels foundering on their journey to or from Lisbon in that period.

Lisbon has always been a busy port and never more so than during the second half of the 19th century. It is possible to see how many English vessels arrived in Lisbon each year by consulting the annual church reports, started by Carol Rankin’s maternal great-grandfather, Thomas Godfrey Pembroke Pope, Chaplain at Lisbon from 1867 and later Canon of Gibraltar. These reports were designed to keep the British community in touch with what was going on. Not just church matters were covered; reports on the British Seaman’s Institute and hospital, the Protestant school, committees, social activities, sporting fixtures and so on were all included. There were handy guides for such things as postage and transport and partial lists of residents in Lisbon and Carcavelos, together with their addresses.

From these reports, and taking a random sample, it is possible to ascertain that in 1881-1183 there were over 1,000 British vessels sailing into Lisbon every year. So many British came and set up businesses to act as shipping agents and suppliers, import/export agents and so on, or to work as employees in these fields.

Two such people were Mr. Garland and Mr. Laidley, who formed the partnership of Garland Laidley in 1856 and became agents for all the Liverpool ship owners. A sixteen-year-old boy by the name of Errington Dawson joined the business in 1866. The business prospered and expanded and the Dawson family eventually became owners of it- it continues today as the Garland Group, managed by the fourth and fifth generations of the Dawson family.

The Rawes family, with commercial origins in the cloth trade, formed the company of James Rawes & Co in Lisbon in the 1860s and became shipping agents for P & O, and for Lloyds of London. This business has also expanded and diversified and continues today. It, too, is run by 4th & 5th generation members of the family.

Carol stressed that British technical knowledge and engineering skills contributed much to the industrialization of Portugal in the 19th Century. John Norton arrived in 1835 with a team of engineers to install machinery at the Royal Mint. He was later asked to stay on and supervise operations there. Carol’s 3x Great Grandfather (maternal), William Hickie, came out from Cork in Ireland after the Peninsular War in order to show the Portuguese how to make butter on an industrial scale and set up a business of his own.

The British community gained further prominence and personalities with the arrival of directors, engineers and employees of the Eastern Telegraph Company in the 1870s, with its submarine cable station at Carcavelos. British engineers also helped start the Lisbon Tram Company and the Anglo-Portuguese Telephone company and ran them

well into the 20th century. Vestiges of their role in setting up an efficient postal system can be seen in the red pillar boxes still in existence today.

Together with a group of local British businessmen, in 1888 Canon Pope founded the Lisbon Athenaeum, a gentleman's club whose purpose was intended to be purely social. Canon Pope died in 1902, but during an official visit to Portugal in 1903, King Edward VII granted the club the right to be called The Royal British Club. It still exists today, as does St. George's Church in Lisbon which burnt down in 1886 and, thanks to the Canon's vigour and powers of persuasion, was rebuilt and re-opened two years after the fire. Both these institutions were central to British community life in Lisbon, as was the Scottish church.

Finally, Carol mentioned sporting activities. The British formed the Lisbon Cricket Club in 1880 when they leased a piece of land at Campo Pequeno and played cricket, football and tennis. They moved to larger premises at Cruz Quebrada where they were also able to play hockey and built 9 golf holes. British influence meant the game of football started to gain popularity in Portugal in the late 19th century; the Portuguese loved watching the British at play and took to it themselves. In particular, three members of the Pinto Basto family, whose mother was English, learned the game at school in England and organized an exhibition football match in Cascais in 1888. Initially the British could only play games amongst themselves, but as the locals became more proficient, games were organized between British and Portuguese teams.

The talk ended with a look at the first ever regatta held in Cascais bay in 1863, which was attended by King D. Luis and his wife. The British took part in this, entering into the rowing races, yet another opportunity to interact with their Portuguese sporting friends.

Recommended further reading:

These articles have appeared in the Society's Annual Report and Review (AR) and are linked to below:

- [Canon, Communications and Cork, An Account of the Pope Family in Portugal; Carol Rankin. AR - 1998](#)
- [An Account of the Rankin Family in Portugal; Carol Rankin. AR - 2002](#)
- [The British Impact on the Development of Sport in Portugal; Andrew Shepherd. AR - 2020](#)

Edward Godfrey