

**THE BRITISH
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF PORTUGAL**

THIRTY FIRST ANNUAL REPORT
AND REVIEW 2004

Quinta Nova
Carcavelos
2777-601 PAREDE

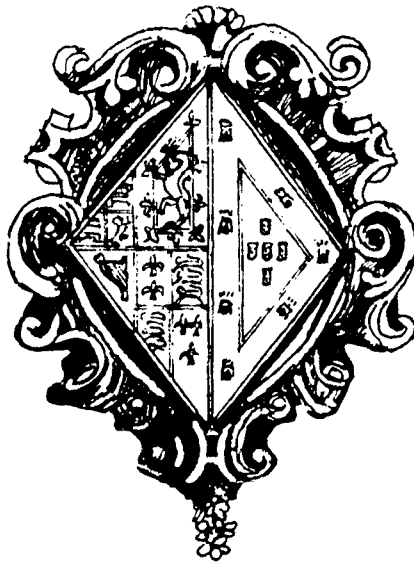
THE COVERLEY FAMILY OF OPORTO

by Angela Delaforce

It was chance and a tragic maritime disaster that took the Coverley family to Portugal. In October 1820, Charles Coverley, his wife Mary and their five children, variously described as 'emigrants' or 'British settlers', sailed from the Clyde on board the ship, the *Abeona* Transport, bound for South Africa, their destination the Cape of Good Hope. As was said at the time, the family had left Scotland 'to seek for greater happiness in a distant clime'.

On 25th November, when the ship was near the Equator, a fierce fire broke out, and, as much of the tackle was rapidly destroyed by flames, only three small lifeboats could be lowered into the sea. Only 49 out of the 160 passengers and crew on board were saved. They would spend seventeen hours at sea before the boats were sighted next day at dawn by the Portuguese merchant vessel, the *Condessa da Ponte*, under Captain Joaquim Almeida, that was sailing from Bahia bound for Lisbon. The survivors were immediately taken on board and, according to one account, 'the humanity and kindness we met with on board this ship redounds very much to the honour of the Portuguese nation'. After searching the area in vain, the ship sailed for Lisbon where it arrived on 21th December. There most of the survivors embarked on the British merchant ship, the *Royal Charlotte*, which happened to be sailing back to Greenock on the 28th of that month.

For reasons that are unknown, ten of the children who had been orphaned in the disaster remained in Lisbon in the care of the 'Gentlemen of the British Factory'. These included Charles Coverley, aged twelve years old, who was placed under the protection of a Mr Munroe. This is probably the Robert Munro who, according to the records, had been admitted to the Factory on 11th January 1820, and in 1824 would be appointed Treasurer. Another child, Thomas Coverley, went to live with a Mr Garland. All the



arrangements for the children's care were made by the Consul General in Lisbon, Mr John Jeffery.

The Coverley children had lost their parents, two brothers and a sister in the tragedy. Thomas would subsequently return to Scotland, but Charles remained in Portugal and he went on to have a very successful life in Oporto where he settled.

In Oporto in 1841, Charles Coverley founded his own firm of shipping and general agents, Charles Coverley & Co. In Lisbon in 1846 he had married an Italian lady, Ignês Fortunato, known as Agnes (d. 1900). They had twelve children; five daughters and seven sons. The eldest son was named Charles Henry Coverley, and he and his brother, Roger (1851-1921), would join the firm which by now also represented various British shipping lines, exported port wine, owned slate quarries at Valongo (the Valongo Slate and Marble Quarries Company) and a mineral water company at Sameiro, near Braga. They also owned lighters and tugs in the harbour at Leixões. Roger was also consul for Monaco in Oporto. Another son, John (b. 1859), married Maria van Zeller of Lisbon. Another son Robert (1863-1944) was a composer of marches and light music. He married an American, Belle Griswold, and they had a son and two daughters, Belinda and Laila.

Charles Henry, who lived in Oporto at 29 *Rua do Campo Alegre*, had a distinguished career. He was Turkish Consul in Oporto. He was also a founder member of the Oporto British Club; of the Royal British Club in Lisbon; of the *Bombeiros Voluntarios do Porto*; a director of the *Associação Commercial, Oporto* and his honours included being made a *Commendador of the Ordem do Christo* by the King, Dom Carlos I.

In 1877, Charles Henry married Emily Waldo (b. 1849), of Clifton, Bristol. Their children were Alice (Stavert), Kathleen Emily and Henry. Henry was for many years British vice-consul in Oporto. Kathleen Emily married James Graham Adam and they were the parents of Joyce (d'Albertanson), Archie, Alice Valerie (Delaforce) and Ian.

Charles Henry, who died in 1890, is buried in the cemetery of the British Church of St James's in Oporto. My mother, Alice Valerie Delaforce, of Oporto, widow of John de Fleuriet Delaforce, is the great-grandaughter of the first Charles Coverley, who arrived in Portugal as an orphan in 1820 when he was just twelve years old.

Sources:

Photocopy of notes, narrative and letters concerning the wreck of the *Abeona* Transport, now in the Glasgow Library, Scotland.

Letter written by John Delaforce to the Anglo-Portuguese News, dated 8th October, 1970

Charles Sellers, *Oporto. Old and New*, London, 1899

A. R. Walford, *The British Factory in Lisbon*, Lisbon, 1940.