

## FÁBRICA DE LOIÇA DE SACAVÉM AND ITS BRITISH CONNECTIONS

by Clive Gilbert

Manuel Joaquim Afonso founded a pottery factory at Sacavém on the outskirts of Lisbon in 1856. This Portuguese entrepreneur owned three glass factories, two in the Marinha Grande area and the third in Lisbon, the *Fábrica das Gaivotas*, close to the Parliament buildings.

Afonso's reason for choosing Sacavém as the site for his pottery manufacture was three-fold. First it was close to Lisbon, the country's biggest market and its largest port. Secondly, the King, Dom Pedro V had just completed building the new railway line to Oporto that passed alongside the factory. This enabled the raw materials to be brought south and the finished products taken to the more densely populated area in the north of the country through the company's own siding. But the main reason for setting up the factory was that Portugal badly needed a modern ceramic industry. Up until then *Vista Alegre*, established in 1824, was the only company in the country producing ceramics on an industrial scale. But it only manufactured expensive and exclusive porcelain tableware. No fine earthenware tableware, bathroom fittings or tiles were manufactured locally and all these had to be imported. But Portugal possessed the raw materials as well as the labour so there seemed little risk in setting up the factory. Afonso's experience as an industrialist in the glass business gave him no guarantees of success in the pottery industry. He discovered he lacked ceramic technology. Although the early production of tableware was of a reasonable quality the production losses were significant and Manuel Joaquim Afonso was forced to seek assistance for the viability of his project.

Somehow he came into contact with John Stott Howorth, a member of Lisbon's British Community. He sought his help because of Howorth's contacts in the UK. Howorth, born in Rochdale in

1829, came out to Lisbon as a young man in 1843 to join his elder brother, Henry Howorth. Henry, married to Elizabeth Beswicke in 1841, had himself come out to Portugal in 1835 to join the Lisbon agency of a Lancashire firm, Hoyle Ashworth & Co. This company, owned by their half-uncle Henry Hoyle 2<sup>nd</sup>, traded in Lisbon as J. Ashworth and was the main importer of English cotton.

John Stott Howorth became a successful businessman and was the concessionaire of the Lisbon-Cintra railway. He later founded the *Companhia do Gás do Porto*, the *Fábrica de Fiação de Xabregas* and the *Fábrica de Moagem do Terreiro do Trigo*. Together with his second brother William (born in 1823) and with a group of expatriates they bought *Fábrica de Loiça de Sacavém* in 1861. To save the company he imported know-how and machinery from the Potteries, or more precisely, Stoke-on-Trent. In 1852 he had married Alice Rawstron, whilst her brother Thomas Rawstron married Elizabeth Howorth after Henry Howorth, her first husband, had died in 1850. John Stott and Alice Howorth had one daughter, Alice Annie, who died in infancy. Later they adopted Evelyne Maria Ellicott, born in Oporto in 1885, granddaughter of Alice's sister Clara whose daughter Anna Maria Haig had married William Roope Ellicott, born in Madeira in 1833.

Apart from machinery and know-how John Howorth also began to import clays, flint and Cornish stone from the UK. These not only were of better and more consistent quality than Portuguese raw materials but their price was lower. Transport by sea from Falmouth proved to be cheaper than that by rail from the Leiria, Pombal or Oporto areas that supplied most of the raw materials. Roads at the time were almost non-existent in Portugal. The newly established railway mostly carried out transport of goods. The stations however, were often quite far from the clay mines. This meant that the clays had to be loaded in relatively small quantities onto bullock carts, taken to the nearest station unloaded and loaded again.

The Howorths, in their quest to make Sacavém a success, invited managers, engravers, modellers, mould-makers, decorators

and other ceramic specialists, to come and bring their expertise to Sacavém. Eventually there were enough expatriates to allow cricket games to take place between Sacavém and Graham's the nearby textile-printing factory at *Braço de Prata*. Many British workers from the Potteries on hearing about the good working conditions as well as the sun and wine, a sharp contrast to Arnold Bennett's smoky 'Five Towns', wanted to come out to work in Portugal but most were unlucky. This letter, a reply to an applicant, was taken from the company's files:

4/2/1874

"Dear Mr. Ellis,

Your letter to our late manager Mr. Barlow came duly to hand. I beg to inform you that, for the present, we do not require your services. All our workmen are natives. The English that have come out here have either gone home or have died out here, they could not keep off the drink and we are doing very well without them.

Yours sincerely

Signed John Stott Howorth"

Sacavém rapidly expanded as its products became widely accepted and appreciated, both in Portugal and in Europe. Once the company was running smoothly John Stott Howorth bought out the other shareholders, including his brother William.



It was at this time in the 1870's through to the 90's that an interesting practice developed that made Sacavém very different from all other ceramic factories. Through John Stott Howorth's friendship with the King Consort, Dom Fernando II (Saxe-Coburg), second husband to Queen Dona Maria II and first cousin to Queen Victoria's Prince Albert, the Portuguese royal family regularly came to Sacavém to paint on pottery. Sacavém thus became the only pottery in the world where royalty went to paint, mostly on plates and vases. The Palaces of *Ajuda*, *Pena*, *Maфра* and *Vila Viçosa* all possess Sacavém items painted by Dom Fernando, his son Dom Luis,

his grandson Dom Carlos, and Queen Dona Amelia, D. Carlos' wife. In 1885 the King, Dom Luis for services rendered to industry, gave John Stott Howorth the title of Baron Howorth of Sacavém. John Stott Howorth's close relationship with the Portuguese Royal family led him to be present at the events organised for the Prince of Wales's (the future Edward VII) private visit to Portugal in May 1876 when he was on his way back from an official visit to India. Whilst the prince was here the King, Dom Luis, organised a donkey ride from the Royal palace in Sintra up to *Pena* Palace for all the Royal party. On learning however, after the event, that the donkey that had been specially chosen for him, was to be renamed *Principe de Galles* by his owner, the Prince promptly purchased him. He then had him taken on board *HMS Seraphis*, the warship anchored in the Tagus that was to take the Prince back to England. The event turned out to be a great festive occasion when all of Lisbon turned out to watch the donkey being rowed out in a launch and taken on board by the Royal Navy. It was usual on these occasions to celebrate events of this nature by making up little rhymes and popular verses. These were circulated around Lisbon on little pieces of paper. One of them, freely translated, said:

"O fortunate donkey from Cintra  
 You're leaving its leafy vales  
 You're going away to England  
 With the Prince of Wales."

Around this time John Stott Howorth took on James Gilman to help him run the company and on the former's death in 1893, his widow Alice succeeded him in the management of the company. (There is a commemorative plaque to Alice, *Baronesa Howorth de Sacavém* at St. George's Church in Lisbon.) By the time of his death the Baron had created a successful company producing fine earthenware tableware as good as any made in the Potteries. He was very fond of his adopted country of residence and in fact in 1890 he took on Portuguese nationality in protest at what he considered to be Lord Salisbury's unpopular Ultimatum over a colonisation issue in Portuguese Africa.

The Baroness invited James Gilman to become her partner and on her return to England in 1909, James Gilman bought a controlling share in the company from the Howorth family. He then changed the name of the company to *Gilman Lda*. The Baroness lived in England with her adopted daughter Evelyne, until her death in 1925. Evelyne herself married her cousin and Henry's grandson, Rupert Beswicke Howorth, later Sir Rupert Howorth. Sir Rupert became P.P.S. to Sir Winston Churchill during the Second World War.

However, as shareholders, the Howorth descendants continued to come out to Portugal for the annual AGM's until they eventually sold out their 49% shareholding to the Gilbert family in 1969.

James's father, Thomas Gilman, a naval engineer, had brought out a new warship to Portugal around 1860 that had been offered by the British government to Portugal. This ship was to be included in the *Vasco da Gama* squadron that was being organised by the King, Dom Luis. The King took a liking to Thomas Gilman and invited him to stay on in Portugal as an attaché to the Portuguese Navy. Thomas was installed in a grace and favour house close to the Royal Palace at Ajuda and his wife Alison and four children came out from England to join him.

One day one of Thomas's daughters, Anne got engaged and announced the event to the Queen, Dona Maria Pia of Savoy. The Queen was delighted and on the spur of the moment, took off the gold and coral bracelet she was wearing and gave it to Anne as an engagement present. This bracelet now belongs to my wife who inherited it indirectly from Anne Gilman, her great-great aunt. Of Thomas's two sons, James and William, the first took a job with Sacavém as a result of the royal friendship with John Stott Howorth whilst William, after a spell in England, returned to Lisbon and set up a glassware factory at *Amora*. James's future wife, Elvira Dias, was the daughter of the commanding officer of the King's Guard and she and her parents lived in one of the grace and favour houses close to the Palace.

James and Elvira lived in Monte Estoril and he, and later on his son Ralph, took the train daily to Sacavém in a private carriage reserved for him and his friends. In those days the train turned off at *Alhandra* onto the northern line and thence to Sacavém.

At Sacavém James Gilman concentrated on expanding the company and particularly in developing a sales team and a network of representatives throughout Portugal. He also launched the production of building materials such as tiles (*azulejos*) and bathrooms, another first in Portugal at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In order to promote the use of tiles James Gilman invited well-known artists to work at Sacavém. Jorge Colaço painted some of the most famous panels. This artist was author of the panels at the Palace Hotel at *Bussaco* and those of the *São Bento* railway station in Oporto. Decorated tile panels became very fashionable and many were applied to public buildings such as the markets at Figueira da Foz, Vila Franca de Xira and Santarém as well as most of the railway stations in the south of Portugal. Most of the houses built in Lisbon in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have Sacavém decorated tile friezes, many of them in the attractive *Art Nouveau* style.

James's only son, Ralph joined his father at the company during the First World War but unfortunately he had other interests in life. James, however, realising this situation, had taken on my grandfather Herbert Gilbert in 1907, to take over the job he himself had held under the Howorths. Herbert Gilbert had first come out to Portugal in February 1896 to take up an appointment at Blandy's in Madeira. Whilst at Funchal he met and married my Portuguese grandmother, Laura de Moura Teixeira, daughter of the Director of the Funchal Hospital. After 11 years however he decided on a move to Lisbon and came armed with introductions to four firms: *Casa Pinto Basto*, James Rawes, Garland Laidley and *Fábrica de Loiça de Sacavém*. My father was born in Lisbon in 1907, just after my grandparents had arrived there.

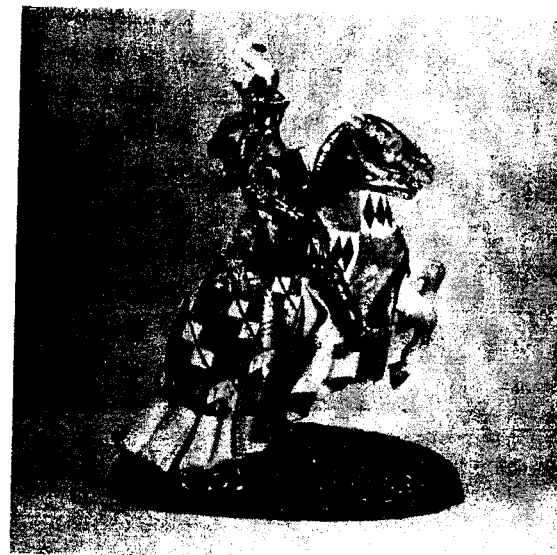
James Gilman died in 1921 and Sacavém continued for a while under the management of Ralph Gilman. The gradually declining fortunes of the company as a result of the free spending habits of Ralph and his first wife, Irene de Gonta, as well as of his second, Manuela Quadros, led Herbert Gilbert to buy him out in the late twenties. This event unfortunately caused a complete breakdown in the Gilman Gilbert family relationship.



Sacavém went through a difficult period following the death of James Gilman. Gradually however the company was restructured and the site which up until this time, the early thirties, occupied the area alongside the railway line on its eastern boundary quickly expanded and doubled in size to 18 acres until it eventually reached the new Lisbon-Oporto road on its western boundary. New mass production items of a consumer nature and promotional or advertising products were introduced.

In the early thirties my father Leland Gilbert joined the company. He helped to consolidate the tableware production and developed the decorative ware department that, up until this time,

only made a restricted range of products. Amongst some of the high quality items he introduced are the well-known Peninsular War military figures that may be seen at the Military Museums in Lisbon and Bussaco as well as the *Leonel Trindade* Museum at Torres Vedras. He also invited a first cousin who lived in the U.K., Donald Gilbert, a sculptor, to model items for Sacavém. Donald, who worked freelance for Royal Doulton, was son of Walter Gilbert, my grandfather's eldest brother, also a sculptor. Walter's most famous work was the design of the gates of Buckingham Palace. In 1936 my father married Joan Sellers who belonged to an Oporto family. At the time however she was living in Lisbon as my maternal grandfather, Frederick Sellers, was head of Socony Vacuum, the future Mobil.



Richard Neville Earl of Warwick  
One of a series of mediaeval Knights on Horseback

My grandfather's uncle was the Charles Sellers who wrote the classic history of the Port Wine Trade *Oporto Old and New* published in 1899. Gerald Cobb, in the sequel, *Oporto Older and Newer* says that Charles Sellers would turn up at his publisher's

office every afternoon to write his book and during that period he would down a bottle of port. Frederick Warren Sellers, my mother's youngest brother joined Sacavém in 1946 and in the early fifties moved to Oporto to run *Fábrica Cerâmica do Carvalhinho*, the Sacavém plant at Vila Nova de Gaia which had been acquired in the early thirties This factory was later sold off in 1964 as capital was required for a major expansion project at Sacavém and Frederick Sellers returned to Lisbon, where he became a shareholder in Sacavém when the Howorth family sold their holding in 1969.

Having finished my studies in the Potteries in the late fifties it was my turn to join the company. I returned to Portugal in 1960 two years before my grandfather died in 1962. Because my grandmother had finally persuaded my grandfather to become a Roman Catholic on his deathbed he was not allowed to be buried at the British Cemetery. Consequently he was buried in Funchal where my grandmother herself was also buried when she died in November of the same year.

Shortly after I returned to Portugal I was introduced, by a curious quirk of fate, to my future wife, Emma Elisabeth Gilman Andersen, by a mutual friend, Rosemary Lindley, later Blandy when she married Richard Blandy.

Just before the 1974 Revolution Sacavém had begun a major new phase of investments but the political events at the time led to these being suspended for some three years. The fact that the town of Sacavém was, together with Barreiro, one of the strongholds of Communism led the company to experience enormous difficulties in its activities. Despite re-establishing its capital investment program in 1977 and later on, in the early eighties, attempting to set up a new plant twenty miles north of Lisbon, the writing was on the wall. The recession of the early nineties finally paid toll to 133 years of British management to what, at one period, had become one of the largest potteries in the Iberian Peninsula.

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