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A SHORT HISTORY OF FÁBRICA DE LOIÇA DE SACAVÉM (1856-1994)
Clive Gilbert

Recognizing a potential market for domestic wares in place of expensive tablewares imported from England and France in the 1850s, Portuguese entrepreneur Manuel Joaquim Afonso (1804–1871) decided to set up a pottery on the outskirts of Lisbon.

He chose as his site the small town of Sacavém on the banks of the River Tagus and just north of the capital. His reasons were four-fold: first, he believed he could substitute reliable but cheaper earthenware for the equivalent imported product; second, the site was close to the country’s largest market as well as its biggest port; third, the king, Pedro V (1837-1861), had recently sponsored a rail link between Lisbon and Oporto, Portugal’s second largest city that was to pass right alongside the plant. Finally, and perhaps more understandably, his father-in-law owned the site itself.

Fábrica de Loiça de Sacavém began operations in 1856. The major domestic ceramics company at the time was Vista Alegre, producing expensive porcelain for the country’s aristocracy and upper classes. This factory had been set up in 1824 in Ilhavo, south of Oporto where china clay, necessary for high-fired porcelain, was first discovered in Portugal.

Early years: Afonso and Howorth 1856-93
Afonso also owned three glass-making factories, two in the Marinha Grande area, 60 miles north of Lisbon and another one in the capital itself. These companies, as with others in the region, were themselves set up with the assistance of Irish technicians, a common collaboration in the period following the
Industrial Revolution in Britain when technology was exported to fledgling industries abroad.

Despite his success in the glass industry, Afonso found he was unable to produce his pottery in the quantity and quality needed to make the company viable. He lacked the know-how and the modern technology of his British competitors, particularly the jiggering and jolling machines to make plates and cups.

The few extant items the company released during the time Afonso managed Sacavém — now held in the Museu de Cerâmica de Sacavém (Sacavém Ceramic Museum) — have blue floral patterns under an insufficiently fired transparent glaze that lacks any sheen. Afonso therefore turned to a local expatriate English businessman, John Stott Howorth (1829-1893) (fig.1) who had come out to Portugal from Rochdale in Lancashire in 1843 to join his older brother Henry in their uncle’s company, J. Ashworth Ltd, the country’s main importer of processed cotton from Britain.

John Stott Howorth became a successful businessman and was the concessionaire of the Lisbon-Cintra railway. Around 1855 he founded the Oporto Gas Company as well as textile and cereal plants in Lisbon. Together with his brother William and a group of other British expatriates, John bought Sacavém from Manuel Joaquim Afonso in 1861 and soon turned it around by hiring technicians, modellers, engravers, artists and other experts in the ceramic industry from the Potteries district in England to come to Sacavém and to pass on their expertise. Howorth also began importing clays, flint and Cornish Stone from the UK. These were not only of better and more consistent quality but also curiously, cheaper. Transport by sea from Falmouth, on England’s south coast, proved to be more economical than that by rail from the Leiria-Pombal or Oporto areas that provided most of Portugal’s raw materials. Roads in Portugal in the 1870s were not extensive and most goods were moved by the railroad system established in the 1840s. The stations however, were often distant from the clay mines and this meant that the clays had first to be loaded onto bullock carts, driven to the nearest station, offloaded and then re-loaded onto the railroad cars.

So successful was the policy of importing both know-how and raw materials that Sacavém began winning prizes both at home and abroad for the quality and design of its products: first prize at the exhibition organized by the Associação Promotora da Indústria in 1876; bronze medal, Exposition Universelle, Paris, 1878; silver medal, Exposição Industrial Portuguesa, Lisbon, 1888; and silver medal Exposição Industrial Portuguesa, 1890.

Within three years Sacavém had assembled a labour force of sufficient skill in both Portuguese and English staff. Those who sought to flee the smoky Potteries and find a more congenial place to work had to be turned away. To one request for a job Howorth replied:
4th February 1874

Dear Mr Ellis,

Your letter to our late manager, John 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 truly,
(signed) John Howorth

The “late manager, John Barlow” was the first to serve under John Howorth at Sacavém. Born in Tunstall, Stoke-on-Trent, the heart of the Potteries district, Barlow boasted he could judge from 100 yards away without seeing into the kiln whether a load of pottery had been fired successfully and with few losses. When incredulous visitors to the company asked him how he managed this feat, he explained that if there was a great number of people around the open kiln door after the ware had been withdrawn then the load had been well fired. If no one was there it was guaranteed the kiln load had suffered high losses.

Royal Patronage 1870s-1910

Howorth was a friend of Portugal’s king consort, Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg (1816-1885), cousin of Queen Victoria’s husband, Prince Albert. He was married to Queen Maria II (1819-1853). A man of artistic talent, Ferdinand began to visit Sacavém in the 1880s in his spare time and relaxed by painting on pottery. He was followed in this custom by his son, the future King Luís I (1838-1889) and later by his grandson, King Carlos I (1863-1908). Sacavém is probably the only ceramic company in the world to have had monarchs painting pottery, mostly plates and vases, as a hobby. There are many examples of royal work in the palaces of Ajuda, Pena, Vila Viçosa and Mafra. Figure 2 shows a plate painted by King Ferdinand. In 1885 Howorth was ennobled Baron Howorth of Sacavém. Five years later he sided with his adopted country against Britain in the dispute over territories in southern Africa (The Ultimatum) and took on Portuguese citizenship. Under Howorth’s guidance Sacavém flourished. In 1877 the company was granted a royal warrant to supply tableware to the royal household, including specially designed tableware for the royal yachts. During the 1880s and ‘90s the company’s products began to include vases and pedestals, bowls, candlesticks, chamber pots, jugs and bowls and kitchenware. Most of these lines as well as the printed patterns for the tableware were copies of pieces produced in the English Potteryes as Portuguese firms were, in these early days, limited by the skill of their artisans and by their marketing capacity to producing simple decorations for the cheaper lines of tableware.

The Next Generation 1900-30: Gilman and Gilbert

Baron John Stott Howorth died in 1893. He and his brother William, who was also a shareholder in Sacavém, are buried in the family plot in the cemetery of St George’s, the Anglican church of Lisbon. Also buried in the plot, according to Adelina
Pires, the late caretaker of the cemetery is an illegitimate son of John Howorth. Apparently this son was very fond of his father and wished to be buried in the family plot. The Church Council at first denied this request but later changed its mind by agreeing with the proviso that his name should not be displayed on the gravestone. Buried nearby in the same cemetery are John Barlow, Sacavém's first manager under the Howsworths, who died in January 1874, and James Gilman (fig 3) and his son Ralph (Raul in Portuguese sources), successive owners of the firm.

Portuguese navy. Thomas and his wife Alison and their two sons and two daughters had settled in Lisbon. As a result of the Howorth connection with the royal family, James, the elder of their sons, was offered a position at Sacavém. When the Baroness decided to return with her adopted daughter Evelyne to England in 1909, she sold a 51% holding in the company to James Gilman. Evelyne married her cousin and Henry Howorth's grandson, Rupert Beswicke Howorth, later Sir Rupert Howorth. Sir Rupert became personal private secretary to Winston Churchill during WWII.

A pair of commemorative plates issued on the occasion of the royal visit to Portugal of Queen Alexandra, wife of Edward VII, and her daughter-in-law, the Duchess of York in 1905 show two techniques Sacavém adopted around the turn of the century (fig.4).

The portraits were made by a process called decalcomania, a method by which a design or image printed on gelatin-coated paper is slid, when wet, onto a glazed or unglazed vessel. The colour borders were created by colour-spraying, called aero- graph or airbrushing, a method of atomizing colour in place of the laborious task of laying ground colour by hand. Both techniques were applied to vases and other decorative items and bathroom fixtures. Sacavém commemorated British royal visits,
weddings and coronations with mugs, plates and the like for the next seventy years. Other celebrations were pictured such as the 600th anniversary of the Anglo-Portuguese Alliance in 1973 and Portuguese events of political, cultural and historic significance.

From around 1910 Gilman went on to introduce new products such as washbasins and water closets as well as wall and floor tiles. Among the many artists at the plant who painted on tile for panels was Jorge Colaço (1868-1942), the son of a Portuguese who lived in Tangier, Morocco, where Colaço himself was born. His most famous panels are those that decorate the entire main hall of the S. Bento railroad station in Oporto (fig 5) as well as the interior and exterior tile panels of the former Royal Hunting Lodge at Bussaco, nowadays a luxury hotel. Sacavém’s first retail outlet opened in Lisbon’s Rua da Prata around 1908 and Gilman enlarged the company’s sales team.

Sacavém achieved a technical breakthrough in 1910 when the company installed the first tunnel kiln in Portugal and one of the first in Europe. Together with the manufacturing facilities for making tableware the kiln was installed in a 500-foot long three-storey reinforced concrete building, another first in Portugal.

Just before World War I, James Gilman also initiated a fruitful connection with the Stoke-on-Trent earthenware pottery Alcock, Lindley and Bloor that until the end of the war provided technical expertise and practical training to Sacavém staff. Several artists and painters came out from England to work at Sacavém although, sadly, none of their work has, as yet, been identified. These are John Willet, Archibald Wilkinson, George Taylor and Alfred Chadwick. The one exception is a signed tile panel by A. Dean dated 1912 that decorates the frontage of a tea and coffee shop in Lisbon’s Avenida Cinco de Outubro, almost opposite the present-day Ministry of Education. The significant number of workers and technicians from the Potteries led to games of cricket being played with Graham’s textile dye plant at Braço de Prata, a little further down river.

James Gilman had married Irene Dias, daughter of the commanding officer of the King’s Guard who, like Thomas, lived in a “grace and favour house” next to the Ajuda Palace in Lisbon. James and Irene had one son, Ralph (d. 1935) who joined his father in the family business. But his heart wasn’t in ceramics. In 1907 James took on Herbert Gilbert (1878-1962) who had left England in 1896 to join Blandys, the Madeira wine producers in Funchal, where he had stayed eleven years. While he was in Madeira he met and married Laura de Moura Teixeira. In 1907 Herbert accepted James’s invitation to join Sacavém. Herbert and Laura Gilbert’s only son Leland was born shortly after they had arrived in Lisbon that year.

Herbert Gilbert quickly settled into his new job. He was responsible for the financial and administrative areas of the company whereas Ralph Gilman dedicated his time to the production and technical areas, leaving his father James the overall running of the company but concentrating on sales and marketing.

James Gilman died in 1921 leaving Sacavém to Ralph. The partnership between Gilman and Gilbert ran into difficulties because Ralph was far more interested in activities outside the business and his free-spending wife, Irene de Gonta. In 1935 Herbert Gilbert decided to buy out Ralph’s position from his widow before the financial situation became desperate. This decision broke up the relationship between the Gilman and Gilbert families as James’s nephew William, son of James’s
brother William, felt that he should have been given the opportunity to continue the Gilman name at Sacavém as he had industrial experience and training in the glass industry. Although they were neighbours in Lisbon the families did not speak to each other for nearly thirty years. (In 1960, after completing a degree in ceramics at North Staffordshire University, in Stoke-on-Trent, the author of these lines, grandson of Herbert Gilbert, was introduced to Emma Gilman Andersen, granddaughter of William Gilman Junior, by Rosemary Blandy, granddaughter-in-law of Ernest Blandy, Herbert Gilbert’s first employer. Clive Gilbert proposed to Emma on Friday December 13th 1963 amidst some recrimination from both sides but eventually good sense prevailed and the long-standing feud ended).

A New Look 1930s-40s: Leland Gilbert

In order to save the company from the receivers Herbert Gilbert was forced to slash costs and renegotiate conditions with the company’s principal customers in 1935. He increased prices by 10% to the largest, Braz & Braz in Lisbon and Albano Alves Marujo in Oporto. He also negotiated discounts with suppliers. New markets that included Brazil and Morocco brought Sacavém valuable breathing space during Gilbert’s reorganization. Products were specifically adapted for this North African market and it became particularly important later during the years of recession resulting from World War II. In time the company was able to right itself and expand. Adjoining land was bought in 1936 increasing Sacavém’s total area to 18 acres. On its eastern boundary lay the main railroad out of Lisbon; the main highway to the north of the country lay on its western boundary. Sacavém possessed its own railroad siding for offloading raw materials and loading the finished products. In the late ’30s Herbert Gilbert also moved the firm’s shop to a new and much larger site on Lisbon’s prestigious Avenida da Liberdade where it remained until the company closed in 1994. At the same time he opened additional retail outlets in Oporto and Coimbra.

Herbert Gilbert also initiated innovative and far-reaching benefits for his workers. He introduced a canteen that supplied abundant, subsidized meals. To guarantee the quality of the foodstuffs he established a dairy with its own cows and a vegetable garden. There was a day nursery for the female workers’ babies, sports facilities and gymnastic classes for the younger workers during working hours, a private pension scheme to supplement the State pension, paid holidays and a resort by the sea where workers could spend a week enjoying fresh air and sunshine. There were grants and interest-free loans as well as free medical assistance by a doctor on the premises. To cope with the risk of fire Sacavém formed its own fire brigade before a local one was chartered.

During this new lease on life the company experienced a shortage of good labourers, despite these enticements. The solution was to virtually import the whole village of Loriga from the Beira Alta region in the central part of Portugal close to the Spanish border. The population of this mainly agricultural region has a reputation as tough and hardworking for this is the mountainous area of the country where winters can be devastatingly cold and the land unforgiving. The transfer was a huge success. Today an association of former Loriga residents and their descendants carries on in Sacavém. To accommodate these workers the company decided to build housing for them on land that had been purchased close to the factory. Bureaucracy however, interfered when the government demanded that many of the houses should also be available for government employees such as policemen, teachers, etc. Understandably the project did
not go ahead. Further government interference took place during WWII when Duarte Pacheco, Minister of Public Works, requisitioned wood that had been set aside for the firing of the ovens. This wood was invaluable as it was impossible to import coal during this period. One of Duarte Pacheco’s other ruses was to request large numbers of wall tiles as samples to accompany quotes for government projects from all the Portuguese factories. As a result he was virtually able to complete many public works at no expense to the government in terms of building materials.

Several German technicians had come to work for the factory in the 1920s, contributing their expertise to Sacavém’s modern look of the ‘30s. In 1926 Josef Clemens, a specialist in preparing metal stencils, arrived, working for the firm until his retirement in 1971. Wilhelm Wagner, a specialist in underglaze painting, joined the company in 1928 to paint and to train younger workers. A wall plate signed by him is in the collection of the Museu de Cerâmica de Sacavém. In 1932 Karl Huber, like Josef Clemens a technician from the Schramberger Majolika Fabrik, came to work for Sacavém as a specialist in underglaze decoration. Huber left Germany because he was disturbed by the growing influence of the National Socialist Party and remained at Sacavém until his retirement in 1969. One of the techniques perfected by the Germans, aerograph (airbrush) spraying—atomizing colours onto pre-cut metal stencils, one for each colour—was instituted at Sacavém as one of the major means of decorating the standard lines of bowls, plates and other kitchenware. Additional mass-produced items were introduced such as yoghurt bowls and objects for advertising.

Six principal techniques for decoration were in place by the 1930s: airbrushing, decalcomania, stencil-printing, impressed-printing, transfer-printing and hand painting. Decal-decorated and printed dinner, tea and coffee sets formed the major share of the market (the top end comprised hand painted and gilded wares). The perennial big sellers since the 19th century continued to be transfer-printed adaptations of the famous English “Blue Willow” and “Statue” patterns, the latter marketed as “Estatua,” or more popularly “Cavalinho” showing a statue of a horseman on a rearing steed in a mock-clasical landscape. “Statue” was not a success when brought out in England but proved to be an enormous seller in Portugal and both “Sacavém” and “Cavalinho” became household words. At the turn of the 20th century “Cavalinho” was also a major seller for the Fábrica de Massarelos in Oporto, owned by the Oporto families Chambers and Wall. The pattern remains popular to this day although produced now by an Aveiro factory. Another item introduced during the ‘30s was a cobalt-blue banded dinnerware set that was finished off with gold lining. Complementary items to this line included vases and even a French Louis XVI-style clock.

Leland Gilbert (1907-1979), Herbert’s son, joined the company in the late ‘20s and by 1930 was the firm’s linchpin in the design of tableware and housewares. New patterns, colours and shapes including a line of tableware in art-deco style helped to overcome the drastic financial crisis. Among the new shapes were functional and decorative items such as ashtrays and figures designed by Herbert Gilbert’s sculptor nephew, Donald Gilbert (1901-1961) during the 1930s. Sacavém continued to enter international exhibitions, winning the Grand Prize at the Exposición Ibero-Americana in Seville, 1929 and a Diploma of Honour at the exhibition organized by the Instituto Agrícola Brasileiro in Rio de Janeiro, 1930.

Donald had also designed pottery items for Royal Doulton, Poole Pottery and Denby before designing for Sacavém. For
Sacavém he completed a series of animal sculptures in various matt glazes together with several pairs of animal-bird bookends. Many of these pieces were re-issued in the 1970s in glazed stoneware. He was also responsible for various functional pieces such as planters, vases and lamp holders. Later the matt or satin vellum glazes that Donald Gilbert used on his work were also applied to tableware and finished off with gold banding. These glazes were developed by Sydney Heath (1885-1969) who came to Sacavém in the 1940s from Stoke-on-Trent where his family owned Sydney Heath & Son, manufacturer of colours and glazes for the ceramics and enamel industries, and still in operation. Amongst Donald's sculptures was the bust of Henry Wood of Promenade Concert fame at the Albert Hall.

Donald's sister Margot (1907-1959) also designed wall tile panels for the company. Unfortunately none of her work, as far as we know, still exists although one drawing for a tile panel signed by her is in the Museu de Cerâmica de Sacavém. She was mainly known for her murals; possibly her best-known work was “Dancing through the Ages” on the ocean liner Queen Mary. She also carried out work on other liners belonging to the Cunard Steamship Company including the Caronia and Sylvania.

Donald and Margot were the children of Herbert's elder brother, Walter, a sculptor and founder of the Bromsgrove Guild in 1898. The Guild produced many important public works including the entrance gates, pillars and railings of Buckingham Palace, the Wellington Frieze at Hyde Park Corner and the W.G. Grace Gates at Lord's Cricket Ground, amongst many others. The Guild also produced many works abroad including the stained glass windows of the English Church in Lourenço Marques, now Maputo, in Mozambique.

The continuing expansion at Sacavém (there were by now around 850 workers) led the management in the late 30's to buy a ceramic plant on the outskirts of the northern city of Oporto. This company, Fábrica Cerâmica do Carvalhinho at Vila Nova de Gaia was sold by the Pinto de Freitas family that had run into financial difficulties due to the world recession. The plant was well known for tiles and bathroom fixtures but had enhanced its reputation with its unique hand painted underglaze wares. Most of this production was exported to the United Kingdom.

Tile wall panels that until the 1930s had served as exterior ornament now began to be used for another purpose: advertising. Tiled billboards were set along the new roads being built by the government. Many companies sought to communicate their products to the general public, and Sacavém was no exception. Its tableware and bathrooms appeared on tiled billboards that had a huge impact judging from increased sales. Some of these billboards still exist in mainland Portugal and on the Azores islands. One in particular stands in the centre of Oliveira do Hospital, a small town in the middle of Portugal that shows a Sacavém art-deco tea set, obviously no longer in production. Some years ago the Director of Lisbon's Museu do Azulejo (Tile Museum) contacted the company with a view to acquiring one of these billboards for its contemporary collection. The Oliveira do Hospital panel seemed to be the obvious candidate and so arrangements were made with the local authorities for its removal with the proviso that the wall to which the panel was applied would be restored afterwards. On the day when two labourers began to remove the tiles, the townspeople rose up in protest and prevented the two men from carrying out their job saying the billboard belonged to the town of Oliveira do Hospital and formed an important part of its heritage. And there the billboard remains.
Figurines and Designer Ware 1940s-50s: A new standard of excellence

Following World War II, Leland Gilbert instituted a policy of offering lines of superbly crafted figurines in both glazed earthenware and biscuit known as “Parian ware”. Sacavém perfected the formula and its figures were immediate hits, particularly among foreigners. Two sculptors produced the majority of the “Parian ware” figurines including putti representing the Seasons, the Arts and Musicians together with a series of both mounted and unmounted equine figures. Among these was a mare named “Aureole,” that belonged to Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, that won the 1953 Epsom Derby. Clariano da Costa sculpted Sacavém’s first models of this period. It should be pointed out that da Costa won an in-house competition at Sacavém for the design of a bathroom suite that was a best seller for many years. Antonio Moreira followed da Costa in the design of figurines throughout the next decades. Neither artist had received formal training. One of Moreira’s best-known pieces is a mounted figure of Henri de la Tour d’Auvergne, Vicomte de Turenne, brilliant marshal of 17th century France.

The acclaimed sculptor at Sacavém, however, was Armando Mesquita (1907-1962), subject of a 2004-5 exhibition held at the Museu da Cerâmica de Sacavém. Mesquita enrolled at Lisbon’s Escola de Belas Artes (School of Fine Arts) before moving to Paris to study in the 1920s. Most of his work is in fine earthenware decorated on glaze, colour that is applied to once-fired glaze and refired at a lower temperature between 680-750°C.

On Mesquita’s return to Portugal he took a job at Sacavém after having been commissioned to produce a sculpture of St Anthony of Lisbon for the 1940 Exposição do Mundo Português (Exhibition of the Portuguese World). At Sacavém Leland Gilbert and Armando Mesquita teamed up to research and reproduce a series of twenty-four military figures of the regiments that took part in the Peninsular War in which Portuguese and British troops under Wellington took on the might of the French army between 1807 and 1811. Each figure of the three main armies taking part (British, Portuguese and French) was carefully researched before being modelled and painted (fig. 6).

Many of these mounted officers and standing officers and soldiers are to be found at the Museu Nacional Militar in Lisbon, the Museu Militar in Bussaco and the Museu Municipal Leonel Trindade in Torres Vedras, but perhaps the most complete collection is in private hands in America.

Other figurines followed: magnificent English, French, Spanish and Portuguese mediaeval knights on horseback. The heraldic detail of their decoration is faultless as a result of painstaking research carried out by Leland Gilbert. The myriad
of onglaze colours including gold and platinum applied during the decorating process of the figurines, particularly on the medi-
aeval knights, required initial biscuit and glost firings, with sub-
sequent lower-temperature firings required for each separate 
colour (fig. 7).

The one time when Mesquita did not model for earthenware resulted from a day in the early 1950’s when a friend of Leland Gilbert praised him for the excellence of his company’s products but then added that they did not possess the quality of those from Wedgwood. This challenge led Leland Gilbert to request Mesquita to design a series of small Jasperware cameos (about 1 inch high) of Greek and Roman mythological subjects. As in the case of the military and mediaeval figurines, these sold only through Sacavém’s retail outlets, mostly to visitors to Portugal. Although cabinet and commemorative pieces and figurines never represented a major part of the company’s turnover (it never exceeded 2 5% of sales) the quality and demand for them and the “military” and Parian-ware figurines introduced in the late 1940s and ‘50s did much to enhance the Sacavém impri-
matur.

Another prolific sculptor who worked freelance for Sacavém and for Vista Alegre among other companies was Leonel Cardoso (1898-1987). He designed the famous “Coleção Bebé” in the late 1940s-60s, a line of baby-faced figurines of the coun-
try’s most typical figures and trades: the washerwoman, the policeman, the soldier and so on.

To meet the growing market demand for more contemporary designs on vases, planters and tableware, Leland Gilbert took on Maria de Lourdes Castro (b. 1934), a young Portuguese cerami-
ic artist who had trained in Lisbon at the Escola Antonio Arroio (an art school) and in Faenza, Italy. Under the name “Arte Nova” (a pun on “art nouveau”) the line she designed in the late ‘50s includes vases, planters, bowls and tea, coffee and dinner serv-
ces where the back or interiors of the pieces are glazed black and the fronts or exteriors are glazed in bright colours. The ves-
sels were fired with a transparent glaze and refired with various coloured glazes applied by hand by means of sponge-tipped brush. Some were also drip-glazed and incised.

During the late 1940s and during much of the ‘60s an extensive modernization programme was invested in the three main production areas of tableware, wall and floor tiles and bathroom fixtures. The renovations first concentrated on the kilns as most of those in existence up until this period were round ovens that heated intermittently, resulting in inconsistent quality and low productivity. Steadier electric roller kilns were acquired for fir-
ing the wall tiles and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) was select-
ed for its cleanliness to heat tunnel kilns used to fire tableware and bathroom fixtures. Fig 8 shows the factory in the 60’s.
The company continued to prosper throughout the 1960s and early '70s and by then the workforce had increased to 1,240. A new logo in the form of a sleek angled “S” signalled a renewed focus on design from around 1972. The development of the tourist industry in the country meant that many new hotels had to be built throughout mainland Portugal and the island of Madeira. Sacavém took advantage of this situation by developing new products to supply the luxury bathroom fixtures required by these new hotels, particularly those belonging to the international chains such as Hilton, Sheraton and Holiday Inn. Many bathroom fixtures were also exported to the Portuguese colonies in Africa and later on, to European and North American markets. Business was compromised by the unstable political situation in Portugal resulting from the government's colonial policy in Africa that led to an Army coup on 25 April 1974. This combined with a market recession and the world oil crisis and later the assassination of one of the firm’s Board of Directors, Diamantino Monteiro Pereira, in December 1982, induced a watershed in the company’s history. It occurred at a time when the firm was attempting to overcome its problems through a major expansion programme that included building a new plant 20 miles north of Sacavém in the town of Carregado. All these events turned out to be too much, and in 1994 the company closed its doors after a period under court administration.

In 2000 the President of the Portuguese Republic, Dr Jorge Sampaio, inaugurated the Museu de Cerâmica de Sacavém on the plant’s site, enclosing the remaining intermittent kiln 18. Its buildings comprise a library, company archives and nearly 2000 examples of completed Sacavém ceramics. Damaged company items are restored at the Museum by qualified staff, and school children attending schools within the local Municipality are taught to throw vessels on a wheel and to model and decorate ceramics. For someone who prided himself on the development of the skills of Sacavém’s young artists, Leland Gilbert surely could not have wished for a better legacy than that the site is today being used, among other activities, to train young children.

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