

BHSP2-1975

**JOHN WILBY**

[The Society's Annual Report for 1974 contained an account by John Wilby of how he and his wife were shipwrecked on a voyage to Lisbon in 1823. This year, by courtesy of Mr. C. G. Tait, we published a letter written by the same gentleman at the age of 83.

John Wilby's daughter, Mary, married James Rawes of Borrodale who came to Portugal in 1817; he was also related to the Tait family of Oporto through the first wife of William Arthur Tait.]

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Cintra, 6th August 1866

My dear Mrs. Tait, (1)

You will consider me a very rude fellow not to answer your very kind letter with more promptitude but I trust you will make allowances for the infirmities of age on which account I have generally to make my niece Jane Chaster my corresponding clerk which she kindly undertakes; this day is the sixtieth anniversary of my arrival in Lisbon then nearly twenty three years of age; when I look back on the time past & reflect upon what I have gone through it appears like a dream. I believe I was one of the first of the Wilbys that ever crossed the sea, & since that period some branches of the family & connections are scattered over the world in every direction, in Asia, Europe & America; Vancouver's Island, New York, Buenos Ayres, Australia, India, St. Petersburg besides those scattered in Europe & some unknown where. Such

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(1) Mrs. Tait (née Marjorie Reid) was the second wife of William Arthur Tait who arrived in Oporto in April 1838 at the age of 21. There were no surviving children of this marriage. By his first wife, Mrs. Chaster, he had 7 sons and one daughter.

are the varieties of life and the vagueness of our calculations for life. I have been in engagements at Sea with French Privateers, once shipwreck'd, seen the French and English armies in front of each other but in such positions as neither of them dared attack the other; the French when in possession of Lisbon sought to take me up as a prisoner but I escaped & got protection on board a Russian Ship of War where I remained three months treated with the greatest kindness by the Russian officers, in Balls, Fetes Champetres & other amusements 'till War was declared between Russia & England<sup>(2)</sup> when I could not continue on board any longer, but went into lodgings on shore where some of the Russian Officers frequently called upon me so that I was considered as one of them at lodgings on shore, where I remained till after the battle of Vimeiro when I saw General Junot come at the head of his troops as a Conqueror under a Royal Salute from the Castle, they were shortly after sent away in English ships & all Lisbon seemed to have gone mad with joy for nine days: & such was the general feeling that to murder a French man was considered by the lower class as a meritorious action.

Now I have spun you a pretty long yarn principally about self it is time to ask about yourself and family.

We have heard that Alfred<sup>(3)</sup> has had a carbuncle upon his Collar Bone which has been very troublesome, & the Boys in England, how are they getting on? & your little maid<sup>(4)</sup> must not be forgot.

With kind love to all & a share for yourself believe me

Yours sincerely,  
JOHN WILBY

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<sup>(2)</sup> After the signing of the Treaty of Tilsit in 1807, and throughout Junot's occupation of Lisbon, the French and Russians were in temporary alliance.

<sup>(3)</sup> The second son of William Arthur Tait. He was John Wilby's godson. He was later created Barão de Soutelinho by King Carlos and given the Grand Cross of the Order of Santiago for his services to the Port Wine Trade. He was well known as a botanist, and was a Fellow of the Royal Society and the Linnean Society.

<sup>(4)</sup> Rosalie Tait, married Hugh Vivian. She died in Oporto shortly before the Second World War.