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The Kingfisher Crest of Davie of Sandford

by Rev. Fulford Williams

In the summer of 1584 John Davy, Mayor of Exeter gave hospitality to António, Prior of Crato, Pretender to the throne of Portugal and his attendants for three months and the *Kingfisher* crest of Davie of Sandford is traditionally connected with this incident.

The story must be told despite its length:

Dom Manuel of the royal family of Aviz (the Eagle), King of Portugal 1495-1521, had three sons and a daughter. John was King of Portugal 1521-57, the Infante Henry was a Cardinal and Archbishop and the Infante Luiz had an illegitimate son, António, by a lady named Violante Gomez (nicknamed The Crane) born in 1531.

The Infanta Isabella married Charles V, Emperor and King of Spain and her son was Philip II of Spain 1558-98.

Sebastian, son of John, King of Portugal 1557-78 was killed at the battle of Acazar-Quibir, Morocco, in 1578 and his uncle Henry succeeded him, on whose death – in 1580 – the legitimate line of Aviz ended.

Philip of Spain claimed the crown of Portugal by right of his mother.

António, son of Luiz, had been appointed by his uncle John, the Prior of the wealthy royal foundation of Crato, and he had taken deacons' orders. His disorderly conduct there led to the Pope – at the royal request – absolving him of his orders and he was made Governor of Tangier. In 1580, the dislike in Portugal of the Spanish connection led António to formally claim the crown of Portugal, despite his illegitimate birth.

He had the popular support but Philip occupied Portugal, defeating António's army and, in 1580, he fled to France. The Azores islands, however, supported António and Catherine de Medici, regent of France, sent him there with a French fleet. The Azores, commanding the American trade and treasure route were important to Philip, who sent his best Admiral, Santa Cruz, to expel António who, with the relics of the French fleet escaped to France and after being compelled to leave there landed at Plymouth in the summer of 1584, before going onto Exeter. António remained in England until 1589 when, as a counter-blow to the Armada, Sir Francis Drake attempted his restoration in Portugal by landing an Army at Peniche which then marched on Lisbon. The national revolt, promised by António, did not occur and the army re-embarked at the mouth of the Tagus and returned to England. Soon after António returned to France where he died in August 1595.

In 1959 the Church of Saint Mary Arches, Exeter was restored after the bomb damage of the 1942 blitz, and this included the restoration of the tomb of John Davy of Sandford. John Davy was mayor of Exeter in 1584, 1594 and 1604. He died aged 70 11th January 1611-12. He was the youngest son of Robert Davy of Sandford, Crediton by the daughter, and heiress of John Bardolph, Esq of Tichfield. He was a merchant of Exeter and made a fortune in the flourishing wool trade of the city. In his first term of office he was the host of Don António, and the family tradition is that the *Kingfisher* crest was given to Davy by António in recognition of his hospitality at that time. It is further supposed to have been a part of the royal arms of Portugal. It is also important that Davy was a friend and ally of Drakem which may be the link with António leading to the abortive invasion of Portugal in 1589.

Information was sought of Don Sinas Alves de Azevedo, the Secretary of the Portuguese Institute of Heraldry, who informed that the *Kingfisher* had no known connection with the Portuguese royal arms, but that the coins struck in the Azores by António had on the reverse a *hawk*, thought to be a rebus on *azor* – a “hawk” in Portuguese and “Azores” the place of minting.

(The Queen once ordered the return to Henry of France of the insignia of the Order of the Holy Spirit by certain English nobles with a curt “My dogs wear My collars”. An order still in force today).

A letter to the author from Mr George West, OBE, formerly Professor of English at Coimbra University, and a student of Portuguese numismatics, suggests that the crest may have been suggested by Don António for Davy's adoption during his visit in 1584, when the arms were assumed by Davy as Mayor, which was not common practice. The idea being that his visit to Exeter was a “halcyon period” in a stormy life.

The idea is completely in accordance with Portuguese royal tradition and is shown by two ceilings still existing in the royal palace at Cintra, made by Don Manuel, António's royal grandfather.

One shows twelve swans commemorating the departure of the Infanta Isabella to Madrid to marry Charles V. The other is of 128 magpies in pairs, each having in its beak the legend *Por Bem* (in honour).

The recorded story of this is that the King was once discovered kissing a maid-of-honour and the ceiling reproves the whispers of the 128 ladies attached to the court.

As Mr West suggests, the “Kingfisher” is in the same line of thought.

Taking all the lines suggested above I believe that the history is that the crest was suggested in 1584 by Don António to Davy's first term as Mayor and confirmed in his second. In any case it is an interesting link with Elizabethan history and thought.

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