

**THE BRITISH
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF PORTUGAL**

THIRTY THIRD ANNUAL REPORT
AND REVIEW 2006

Quinta Nova
Carcavelos
2777-601 PAREDE

THE MARQUESA DE TOMAR

by António Pinto da França



Marquesa de Tomar when she was Ambassador to Santa Fé

Lúsa Meredith Read was born in England on September 11th, 1816. Her life provided her with very enriching and diverse experiences and would lead her to places

far away from her childhood. She savoured glories and anxieties, and she was a privileged witness to the many turbulent changes which marked the XIXth century.

Luísa was the maternal grandchild of Melchisedec Meredith, a Welshman, who considered himself a descendent of ancient Welsh heroes. Melchisedec had seven children among who was the mother of Luísa Read, Louise Mitchel Meredith, considered by J. B. Priestley to be the most brilliant of the children. Priestley makes this comment when writing about another member of the family, George Meredith¹.

On her father's side, Luísa came from a branch of the Irish Reads who lived in Berkshire and Oxfordshire since the XVIIth century. This family was connected to George Read (1733-99), one of the signatories of the American Declaration of Independence².

John Read, Luísa's father, was a wholesale merchant in India until he was ruined by a brother-in-law, to whom he had given partnership. His brother, who was Consul-General in the Azores, came to the rescue and appointed him vice-Consul on the island of S. Miguel. However, he never even reached the Azores. The ship taking him from London to Ponta Delgada was lost without trace.

The wife and the three small children whom John Read had left in England were reduced to a precarious financial situation. Once again, the uncle-consul in the Azores, William

¹ George Meredith, also a grandchild of Melchisedec Meredith, was the inspiration for his cousin, Luísa Read, for one of the characters of his novel "Evan Harrington".

² Luísa Read would meet a great-grandson of this George Read who was an American diplomat in London and Athens. He was called John Read and, by coincidence, a son of a Meredith. They would exchange much correspondence, in these letters John Read would boast of his relations with the Princess of Wales, but also information on family connections and common ancestry.

Harding Read, helped by bringing the family to live with him. He married his widowed sister-in-law, with whom he would have a child, and would look after his brother's orphans as if they were his own.



William Harting Read, Luisa Mitchel Meredith and her daughter Luisa Meredith Read

Thus, Luísa Read, still a child, went from London fogs to the pleasant climate of the Azores and the comfort of an easy existence of a provincial life. However, such a small world would gain some cosmopolitan touch in the years when the liberals and the Emperor made these islands the base for the counter-offensive which would eventually beat the followers of D. Miguel³. Several foreign families also lived in S. Miguel

³ After the Peninsular War, Portugal was torn by civil strife which culminated in a civil war (1828-1834) between two royal brothers: D. Pedro (Emperor of Brazil) and D. Miguel. D. Pedro represented the Constitutional cause and D. Miguel the Traditionalists or Absolutists. In 1826, D. Pedro proclaimed the *Carta Constitucional*, a conservative constitution.

and therefore the British Consul's step-daughter was destined to occupy an important position in local society.

William Harting Read was a remarkable personality. Throughout his life he proved himself to be a man of character, as well as sensible, brave, generous and tolerant. He was born in 1774, in Portsmouth and died in S. Miguel in 1839, heading the British consulate in the Azores for thirty years.

When, as a naval officer, William Harting Read captured in the northern Atlantic a Spanish ship coming from Mexico, loaded with gold and silver⁴. His share in prize money assured him a comfortable situation. Sailing back to the Mediterranean to join Nelson's fleet, he visited S. Miguel which fascinated him.

During a naval confrontation in Mediterranean waters, he successfully manoeuvred, with great risk, a ship in which he was a lieutenant, saving her from capture by the enemy. This service earned great praise from Nelson and he received, as a reward, the appointment of Consul-General in the Azores. The fascination he felt for S. Miguel had not disappeared. He took up his functions in 1800 and being a distinguished mathematician he concluded, in 1805, a new map of the island where he resided.

He accompanied the vicissitudes of the Azores during the liberal wars. In 1828, claiming lack of water and victuals, an English brig anchored at Ponta Delgada which had tried to break the blockade to the island of Terceira and having been captured was sent to Lisbon under escort of a *Miguelist* detachment. The Commander of the brig was hiding on board

⁴ Spain was, then, France's ally.

Bernardo Sá Nogueira⁵ and a brother who had attempted to join the liberal forces in Terceira. Once in S. Miguel, the Commander took them, during the night, to the residence of the English Consul. Without hesitation, William Read gave them shelter. However, some days later, someone having denounced the presence of strangers, the Captain-General, Henrique Sousa Prego, sent an important employee to the residence of William Read to obtain the deliverance of the fugitives. He categorically refused to do so. Afterwards, the Consul-General, knowing an assault to his residence was being prepared, fortified the house and went looking for the Captain-General to whom he invoked extra-territoriality, giving notice of the serious consequences of an assault to the consular post of a foreign nation. The captain-general abandoned the resort to force. In recognition of this act and other support rendered to the liberal cause, the Emperor D. Pedro granted him the *Torre e Espada*.

Four years later, the situation inverted, it was at the British Consulate that the former Captain-General Sousa Prego found protection. Despite his option for the liberal cause, William Read did not deny refuge to a follower of D. Miguel, threatened to be lynched by an infuriated mob.

Luísa Read was around 12 and 16 years old when she witnessed these events which threatened to endanger the safety of her family but tempered her spirit to other future challenges which she would face later in life. She must have surely learnt from her stepfather's firmness and serenity. It is said that from a very young age, she revealed herself to be authoritarian and sure of herself.

From the example of a brilliant mother, as she was considered by J. B. Priestley, and of a scholarly step-father of

⁵ A hero of the liberal wars and future marquis of Sá da Bandeira.

firm character, who was a father to her, it is to be presumed that Luísa Read benefited from an exemplary upbringing and education. She must have been brought up in a very British context. Her family surely maintained, as do Englishmen found in the more distant latitudes of their island, the habits and traditions of origin. On the other hand, her adolescence took place in an environment of refinement and quality. The family lived in the lap of luxury. William Harting Read had made a good fortune. Whether in the great mansion of Ponta Delgada or in the *Bela Vista's* seigniorial farm-house, dinner parties took place, balls, parties, concerts, and hunts. The Emperor D. Pedro visited them twice.

In that environment, Luísa Read gained experience for the future positions of distinguished representation which were in store for her.

Soon the man who would pull her out of that narrow world and drag her along in the wave of his tumultuous political destiny for the rest of her life, would come.

In May 1833, a judge of the Court of Appeal, António Bernardo da Costa Cabral, arrived at Ponta Delgada. He was born in Fornos de Algodres⁶ in 1803 into a not very wealthy noble family. He was aggressive, determined, authoritarian and of a boundless ambition which he would come to satisfy although with many and bitter disappointments. He was, then, very much at the left wing within the political spectrum of that time. Enlisted in the liberal disputes, he had been exiled in various European countries before joining D. Pedro in Terceira, having participated in the disembarkation of the Mindelo⁷.

⁶ A small town in the Beira Alta

⁷ A beach north of Porto.

A few days after disembarking in S. Miguel, William Harting Read invited António Bernardo for a hunt in the *Bela Vista* farmhouse. It is said that after lunch he no longer accompanied the hunters. António Bernardo stayed behind wooing a 17 year old Luísa Read. They would marry a few months after.



William Harting Read's property Quinta da Bela Vista in S. Miguel.

She would soon suffer when her husband led the forces which suffocated a *Miguelist* rebellion which started on the island and quickly assumed grave proportions. The prestige he obtained with this episode assured him the election as a member of Parliament for the Azores, where he revealed to be a fearless speaker, giving voice to the sectors more left wing of the opposition.

In 1835, Luísa Read left S. Miguel to join her husband in Lisbon, taking her first son with her.

Three years later, in the emergency of the chaos, close to anarchy, which had taken hold of the capital, Costa Cabral, then a *Septembrist*⁸ member of parliament, was appointed General Administrator of Lisbon. The fact that he was a political figure of the left and his acknowledged authoritarianism determined that choice. They had not made a mistake. He would firmly restore order and, within that context, his conversion to the ideas of the Portuguese right began to take place. During this crisis he did take some serious life threatening risks. Again, Luísa Read went through hours of anguish, which she faced with the serenity and courage which so much characterised her.

Meanwhile, it was in this year of 1838 that the government, after the nationalisation policy of the assets of the religious orders, placed in public auction a part of the *Convento de Cristo*, in Tomar, with its grounds. The lot was bought by António Bernardo da Costa Cabral. Within the new political class it was in vogue to buy the nationalised convents to transform them into summer houses, as a way to compete with the manor houses of the old nobility. But, once again, Costa Cabral gave wings to his own ambition, only the most prestigious Portuguese monument would be appropriate for him. This option was also perhaps the reflection of the unlimited confidence he entrusted in his star. It seemed as if he could guess the exact time he would succeed. By then, the acquisition of a property of such relevance would seem out of proportion for someone who had only been a judge, a parliamentary and now general administrator of Lisbon. In fact, he did not waste time to adapt in his summer residence, a wing of those immense spaces which he furnished sumptuously. Luísa Read, then 22 years of age, would be the hostess of that truly royal mansion until the end of her life.

⁸ There had been a left wing revolution in September 1836.

The success of António Bernardo continued. In 1839, he was appointed Minister of Justice and in 1840 he was appointed Member of Parliament again. And it was in this same year that the Monarchs agreed to be godparents of Fernando, the third child of Costa Cabral and Luísa Read to whom they offered valuable English gold finery.

Two years later, Luísa Read suffered again difficult days. Now her husband decided to instigate in Porto the movement for the restitution of the *Carta Constitucional*, victoriously marching on Lisbon. After these successes, Costa Cabral was appointed minister of the realm. In the large house at the *Calçada da Estrela*, where they lived, the most important political figures visited on a daily basis. Luísa Read's responsibilities as a hostess grew making her a necessarily firm, acute and discrete hostess.

Throughout these troubled years, a unique and profound empathy grew between António Bernardo and the Queen. D. Maria II saw in Costa Cabral a protector, a guarantor of the Crown and a loyal friend. The clear intimacy between them began to give rise to rumours regarding the nature of their relationship. Everything indicates that the Queen, constantly pregnant, never had a scandalous relation with her minister. Nor would that supposition adjust to her psychological profile or her lifestyle. It would be more in conformity with the circumstances to admit the existence of an *amitié amoureuse* between them, something purely platonic.

Until today, the family have never believed that D. Maria II and António Bernardo had been lovers. Among the descendents of Costa Cabral there are also no echoes of any suspicions on behalf of Luísa Read in what concerns the friendship between her husband and the sovereign. On the

contrary, until today, the letters exchanged between her and the Queen are still kept, pointing out a degree of proximity, understanding and affection. However, it is also true that Luísa Read, as all Englishwoman, was severely brought up to control her emotions. It is possible that she harboured suspicions about the true nature of that intimacy between António Bernardo and the Queen and that she suffered in the most rigorous silence. Besides, it is most likely that she would already be suffering from the rumours concerning that subject of which, surely, she would have had knowledge. It was one more humiliation adding to the shameless attacks that the political enemies would throw against her husband, accusing him of the utmost enormities, most particularly of stealing. In this period, every day, the press amplified ignominious accusations and suspicions. Luísa Read controlled herself, kept a façade of high indifference but, certainly, suffered inside. When she became thirty, she had attained a maturity which reinforced her capacity to face the difficulties in life. She had learned to live in the shadow of the overwhelming figure of António Bernardo, without however renouncing to the strength of her personality.

In 1845, António Bernardo invited the Monarchs to visit Tomar and to stay at his house in the *Convento de Cristo*. A major part of the responsibilities with the accommodation of the Monarchs and the organisation of this visit within the residence of the Costa Cabral, certainly fell on Luísa Read.

The Monarchs came on the 7th of September and stayed for four days. The next morning there was a sovereign's levée at the *Convento*. When she entered the room, the Queen said in a loud voice: "Good morning Count of Tomar". In this manner she announced that the honours that for some time he had desired, had been granted to António Bernardo.

It is known that Luísa Read was interested in genealogy and heraldry and she was proud of being a descendent on Meredith's side of a very ancient Welsh lineage in which was included a *condottieri* who had faced the Saxon invasion. It is, thus, understandable her rejoicing regarding the granting of the title. She would later show worry on the future of the House manoeuvring for to only her first son to get married, so that he would carry the bulk of the fortune which would assure the representation of the family.

Costa Cabral would come to pay a high price for this royal visit. The authoritarian government would lead to the understanding that all political movements wanted its overturn. On the pretext of this visit of D. Maria to Tomar, her enemies would manoeuvre in the English press the release of reports on the scandalous relations between the new count and the sovereign. Costa Cabral made a new mistake. He sued the English periodicals and lost the proceedings. This must have been the last straw which caused the emergence of the insurrection of Maria da Fonte (1846). That rebellion of popular and local nature spread out all over the country, compelling Costa Cabral to flee to Galiza and to exile in Spain. After some troubled months, Luísa Read went as well to Madrid with their four children.

At a certain point, hoping to keep him away from Portugal, the government appointed Costa Cabral ambassador to Madrid. There, Francisco de Assis was born, their last son, baptised in the Royal Chapel by the Patriarch of the Indies, and whose godmother was Queen Isabel II of Spain. Luísa Read received from the Queen an attire of diamonds⁹ and the sash of the Royal Order of Maria Luísa of Spain. Even though pulled into the wake of the tumultuous fate of her husband, Luísa

⁹ Still in the family.

Read kept on accumulating honours which, in some way, compensated her for the scares and troubles she went through.

In 1849, after a political summersault in Lisbon, António Bernardo came back to Portugal to preside over the new ministry. It would not last. Not even two years later, an insurrection by the Duke of Saldanha would overturn the government.

They stayed in Lisbon for some years. António Bernardo remained in the State Council and in the House of Peers, but never again did he have the opportunity to return to power. In truth and much against his will, this would be the end of his political journey.

When the Regenerator party came back to power in 1859, in a mixture of old fears and understandings, he was offered the embassy in Brazil which he accepted. He and Luísa Read had taken a likeness for the journeys and the diplomatic life. He would be very successful in his mission in a period when the Brazilians were still very doubtful and sensitive about Portugal.

During their stay in Rio de Janeiro, Luísa Read was entrusted by the widow empress of D. Pedro¹⁰, who remained in Portugal, with the promotion, within the Portuguese colonies, of a subscription for the shelter for ill-favoured children in Lisbon, and obtained a brilliant result. Their stay in Brazil was short and two years later they were already back in Portugal.

António Bernardo decided to retire to his residence at the *Convento de Cristo*, where he would remain most of the following decade.

¹⁰ The Empress D. Amélia Beauharnais, daughter of Eugénio (Napoleon's stepson), Duke of Leuchtenberg, and 2nd wife to D. Pedro of Brazil and Portugal.

These were heavy years for Luísa Read. She was never fond of life in Tomar, nor was she consoled by the fact they resided in those royal spaces filled with history. All this was strange to this English lady who grew up on the island of S. Miguel, accustomed to the luxuries of court life in Lisbon, Madrid and Rio de Janeiro. From time to time she would welcome visitors from Lisbon but she would often get bored of that provincial apathy after so many years of cosmopolitan life. To occupy herself, she decided to make wine. She sent for an oenologist from Burgundy and planted large vineyards in the *Anunciada Velha* farm, in the surroundings of Tomar. She produced excellent wine. In her grandchildren's generation, the corks of the bottles that were remaining from the wine of the "marchioness grandmother" and which she labelled *Château Thomar*, would still be annually changed. In the *Convento de Cristo* there is still memory of her presence in the name which, until today, is given to a *Charola* neighbouring tower, called "The Countess Tower". It is said that she liked to be alone there to enjoy the landscape, to write and to have tea.

And so the years went by until, in 1870, a new government of the unquiet Saldanha decided to invite Costa Cabral to take on the duty of ambassador by the Holy See, the most prestigious diplomatic position in Portugal.

António Bernardo accepted and took his older son as secretary of the embassy. Luísa Read would join them only in January 1871. In this way she would be spared the frightening moments that, certainly, she would have gone through during those dramatic days when the Italian army bombarded and took Rome. The crisis over, she would savour in peace the pomp of the papal court and the splendours of the mundane life of the black nobility¹¹. She resided in a part of the Cardelli Palace,

¹¹ The roman nobility that refused to acknowledge the Sabóias.

which meanwhile her husband had rented and was situated in front of the Gongaza Palace and was a neighbour of the Borghese Palace. These were years of intense social life. They would constantly have guests and Luísa Read had heavy household responsibilities. She was accustomed to that, it was not a burden for her and on the contrary, it gave her great pleasure. From those times, there are still menus from the dinners they gave, in which the *Château Thomar* was always included in the list of available wines.

Luísa Read met two Popes, Pio IX and Leão XIII. In one of the audiences with the latter she took her granddaughter who was photographed with the entire family, sitting on the lap of the Pontifex¹².

Meanwhile, honours followed which we know she appreciated and which are thought to have been a compensation for the set-backs in her troubled life.

In 1875, she was appointed Queen's D. Maria Pia honorary lady-in-waiting.

Three years later, on proposal to King D. Luís from an acrid political enemy, the minister Rodrigues Sampaio, Costa Cabral was made Marquês de Tomar. Luísa Read was now a marchioness.

When King Vítor Emanuel died, Queen D. Maria Pia of Portugal went to Italy to attend her father's funeral. Luísa Read, her honorary lady-in-waiting, would accompany her during her

¹² Her descendents keep a photograph of Leão XIII with the following dedication, in latin: *Fortitudo et decor indumentum est et mulier timeos ipsi laudabitur*, that is, "The fortitude and dignity are the clothing and the woman which is remembered is who ennobles him". It concerns a dedication to Costa Cabral in which the Pope refers eulogistically to Luísa Read. It was given on the occasion of the departure of António Bernardo from Rome, when she had already died.

stay. Returning from the Italian frontier where she said goodbye to her sovereign, she remained at the side of a friend who was in agony. Teresa de Assis Mascarenhas, daughter of the Count of Óbidos, was also D. Maria Pia's lady-in-waiting and in that capacity accompanied her to Rome, becoming seriously ill in the Quirinal Palace where she would eventually die. The Marquesa de Tomar was so close to her that, a few years later, when still in Rome, she perceived that also her life was coming to an end; she determined that she wanted to be buried next to her friend's grave.

She died at 69 years of age, on the 6th of February of 1885. She left five children: António Bernardo, who would become 2nd Count of Tomar, João, Fernando, Luísa and Francisco de Assis.

Due to the fact they were ambassadors of Portugal at the Holy See, inherently "Protectors" of the multisecular institution of Santo *António dos Portugueses*, the solemn funeral rites were celebrated in that church. The Portuguese Royal family was represented at the funeral by the ambassador to the Italian Government, Matias de Carvalho e Vasconcellos. The requiem mass was officiated at by the Bishop of Angola and the maestro Puccinelli conducted the orchestra.

António Bernardo erected in her honour a sumptuous tomb in Carrara marble, in the cemetery *Verano*¹³. In accordance to her wish, she was buried next to the grave of her friend Teresa Assis de Mascarenhas.

Recently, one of her great-great-granddaughters, like her, ambadress to the Holy See, managed to collect, from

¹³ On that tomb is engraved the following: "To the long and venerable memory of D. Luísa Meredith Read da Costa Cabral, dedicated wife and cherished mother – Marquesa de Thomar – Honorary Lady-in-waiting of Her Majesty the Queen D. Maria Pia – Lady of the Royal Order of Maria Luísa of Hespanha – Deceased in Rome on the VIth of February of MDCCCLXXXV.

the many descendents of Luísa Read, the considerable sum needed for the restoration of that majestic monument, which meanwhile had come to a state of degradation¹⁴.

It is hard to write biographies of feminine personalities of the XIXth century. They lived, in their majority, hidden under their husband's shadow. That is certainly the case with Luísa Read given the dimension and overwhelming personality of António Bernardo da Costa Cabral. To write about her is to enter in a game of mirrors. The figure of the Marquesa de Tomar reveals itself mostly through the progress of her husband's life. However, from that exercise and from memory she left, it is possible to perceive a strong, authoritarian, courageous, controlled character, vulnerable to the vanities of this world, and as ambitious as her husband. Furthermore, in her, the marks of her origins and British education always prevailed.

Tomar, *Anunciada Velha* 20th March, 2007

--ooOoo--

António Pinto da França is a distinguished retired diplomat.

He headed a number of diplomatic missions in important posts such as Luanda, Bonn Jakarta and the Holy See.

Ambassador Pinto da França has written a number of books on his experiences in various capitals and historical subjects. His wife, Sofia, is a gifted painter and a direct descendent of the Marquesa de Pombal.

¹⁴ Contact with an American who was restoring many tombs in the English cemetery in Rome was established. However, he had to be replaced by a company of a family which for many generations has dedicated to this craft, due to the fact that the *Verano* cemetery is today a national monument and only companies authorised by the Heritage services can operate there. However, the Costa Cabral coat of arms set on the tomb, which had lost big part of the mosaics, was restored by a fourth granddaughter of Luísa Read. The mosaics of various colours were given by the "Fábrica da Basílica de São Pedro.