

The O’Neills of Portugal

by

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Introduction

Ever since their arrival in Portugal, the O’Neills have made a major contribution to the Portuguese economy and to its social and cultural life. This article traces these contributions, from the arrival of Shane O’Neill and his brothers in Lisbon in 1740 to the present day.

The O’Neills

The O’Neill dynasty has several branches and all were to some extent involved in the rebellions by the Irish against the English, which went back to 1530. In 1607, during the rule of King James I, some of their titular heads ended up on the Continent after being dispossessed of much of their land by the English under the leadership of Lord Mountjoy. Notable amongst these was the 2nd Earl of Tyrone, Hugh O’Neill, who left Ireland headed for Spain in 1607, together with the 1st Earl of Tyrconnell and about ninety followers, in what is famously called the *Flight of the Earls*. Due to bad weather, they initially landed in France but that branch of the O’Neill family did eventually end up in Spain.²

The Portuguese O’Neills departed rather later. Known as the O’Neills of Clanaboy, they descended from Féilim (Felix) O’Neill. He fought against William of Orange at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 and in the defence of Limerick, before sailing to France with his regiment, entering the French Service in 1691 and fighting with the Irish Brigade. Members of the Irish Brigade were convinced that they had a role to play in maintaining close connections with the Jacobite officer corps in Continental armies.³ After taking part in numerous battles, he was killed fighting for France against the English and Austrians at the Battle of Malplaquet in September 1709, during the War of Spanish Succession.

In 1701, the British Parliament passed the Act of Settlement, which excluded Catholics from the succession. Soon after the passage of this Act, when Queen Anne had become the monarch, Féilim’s estate was confiscated by the British. His only son, Conn O’Neill, remained in Dublin, marrying Cecilia O’Hanlon, a descendant of the sister of the Great Hugh O’Neill,⁴ but their eldest son, João O’Neill (Shane O’Neill), who was born in Kilmore, County Tyrone, moved to Portugal in 1740, together with his two brothers. The family has been in the country ever since.

The current head of the family is Hugo Ricciardi O’Neill. His great-grandfather, Jorge Torlades O’Neill II, of whom much more later, successfully pressed a claim to the British College of Arms in 1896 to be recognised as Head of the entire House of O’Neill. He also presented several documents to the Portuguese “Council of Nobility” resulting in the Clerk of the Nobility awarding him a Certificate on 30 June 1902. He then started to refer to himself as the Count of Tyrone.⁵

¹ The assistance provided in the preparation of this paper by Hugo O’Neill, Joe Harrington, Desmond Carr, Ninna Taylor and Mark Crathorne is gratefully acknowledged.

² C.P. Meehan. *The fate and fortunes of Hugh O’Neill, Earl of Tyrone, and Rory O’Donel, Earl of Tyrconnell; their flight from Ireland, their vicissitudes abroad, and their death in exile.* (Dublin, J. Duffy, 1870)

³ Kevin Wheelan. *A nation in waiting? The Irish in France in the eighteenth century.*

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328019747_A_nation_in_waiting_The_Irish_in_France_in_the_eighteenth_century

⁴ Hugo O’Neill, pers. comm.

⁵ Cascais. *A Tour of Irish Interest.* <https://www.visitcascais.com/media/1712/a-tour-of-irish-interest.pdf>

The Move to Portugal

When it became clear that the Jacobite cause was lost and that the Catholic Stuarts were not going to be restored to the British throne, many Irish inevitably looked south to the Catholic countries of Spain and Portugal. Patricia O’Connell notes that Shane “could no longer lead in Ireland the life of a gentleman, and all hopes of fighting for the revival of Gaelic rule were lost”.⁶ Advised by the Archbishop of Armagh, he opted to move to Lisbon.

Contacts between the Irish and Portugal had gone back a long way, facilitated by the ease of maritime access. During medieval times there was extensive trade between the countries. By 1450 Ireland was importing a wide range of Iberian products, including wine, and was exporting meat and timber. Between 1450 and 1520, Portuguese Franciscans, Dominicans and Augustinians were active in Ireland and the people of Lisbon, in particular, provided financial and other support to Irish émigrés.⁷ In 1585, many Irish arrived in Lisbon, after the failure of the second Geraldine Rebellion.⁸ In 1590, the Jesuit Irish College was established in Lisbon as a school where young Irishmen could study the Catholic Faith with the intention that they would “return to their country to refute the errors of heretics”.^{9,10} Irish Dominicans also established the *Corpo Santo* convent and the Sisters of *Bom Sucesso* (in Belém).

On their arrival in 1740, the O’Neills initially stayed at the *Bom Sucesso*, where they were looked after by Father Brian Brulaughan, the rector of *Corpo Santo*, then moving to Rua da Emenda in Lisbon. Shane (João) then crossed the Tagus to buy the *Quinta da Arealva*, which was on the river and had its own dock. At the Quinta he grew grapes for wine.¹¹ Brulaughan later introduced him to his future wife, Valentina Maria Josefa Ferreira, and they married in Lisbon in 1750. João died in 1788. His brothers married into other expatriate Irish families.¹²

Carlos O’Neill

João’s first son, Conn, died at a young age. His surviving son, Carlos (Charles) O’Neill (1760-1835), was educated at the English Catholic School, St. Omer, in Douai, Normandy. Carlos’ two sisters were both to be the Prioress at *Bom Sucesso*. He became a trader and an extensive landowner, particularly in the Setúbal area. Marrying Ana João Torlade in 1784, he inherited the *Casa Comercial Torlades* from his father-in-law, Jacob Frederico Torlade, who originally came from Hamburg and became a naturalized Portuguese in 1781. The *Casa Comercial Torlades* had a variety of business interests, including orange and salt exports and a sardine cannery, *Sociedade de Pescarias Setubalense*.¹³ Torlade was also the Setúbal Consul for the Hanseatic League. In addition to the company, O’Neill also inherited through his wife the *Quinta das Machadas* in Setúbal. This had been purchased as farmland by her father from the Botelho de Moraes Sarmiento family: he built a house on it in 1770 and created Portugal’s first intensive farm to grow oranges for export. At one time the *Quinta* had 6,000 orange trees, as well as vines and olive trees. It is now just eight hectares but has stayed in the family. The house and garden are in the *Pombaline* style.

The impact of the Peninsular War on the O’Neills may have been relatively minor. During the brief time when the country was controlled by the French under the command of General Junot, rape and pillage by

⁶ Irish Times. 30 Oct. 2001. *Tracing our Lisbon Lineage*. <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/tracing-our-lisbon-lineage-1.334704>

⁷ Declan M. Downey and Pedro O’Neill Teixeira. *A Lisbon tour of Irish interest*. 2008

⁸ A rebellion by the FitzGerald dynasty in Munster against English government control over the province. The rebellions were motivated both by the desire to maintain independence from the English and to protect Irish Catholicism from English Protestantism.

⁹ Patricia O’Connell. *The Irish College at Lisbon, 1590-1834*. Four Courts Press, 2001

¹⁰ M. Gonçalves da Costa. *Saint Patrick’s School of Lisbon*. BHSP Annual Report 16, 1989

<https://www.bhsportugal.org/library/articles/saint-patricks-school-of-lisbon>

¹¹ Raquel Maria da Silva Fernandes, 2007. *A casa de Santa Maria em Cascais: especificidades de um património arquitectónico e artístico*. Master’s dissertation, University of Lisbon. <https://repositorio.ul.pt/handle/10451/500>

¹² O’Connell, *op cit*.

¹³ Arquivo Nacional, Torre de Tombo. <https://digitarq.arquivos.pt/details?id=4334625>

the French troops had been common. However, under the leader of the French troops south of the Tagus, Jean François Graindorge, the French were restrained, allegedly because his Portuguese mistress persuaded him to control his troops. Carlos O'Neill was a very close friend of Joaquim Pedro Quintela, one of the richest men of the time and a major financier of the *Teatro Nacional de S. Carlos*. He had a box there, although whether he was able to use it during the French occupation is not recorded.¹⁴

In 1819, Carlos bought a leather factory and the farmland on which it was situated and brought from Ireland a father-and-son team named Broughton, to run it. By 1826 the tannery was being managed by his second son, Henrique, employing 80 workers. Later the farm and factory were transferred to the *Casa Comercial Torlades*. However, it was perhaps not a great financial success, as by 1842 the property was being rented to local farmers. It is not clear whether they continued to tan or just wanted to farm the land. Subsequently the land was transferred to Pauline, the daughter of Henrique, when she married a local landowner of Dutch descent, José de Groot Pombo.¹⁵

Carlos was friendly with Queen Maria I. As was the custom, as a godson of the Queen's eldest son, José Maria, Prince of Brazil, his eldest son was given the name of José Maria. Further evidence that the family was already moving in the highest Portuguese circles comes from the fact that he received a visit from King João VI at the *Quinta das Machadas* in 1825. Carlos and his wife had nine children. José Maria, who was born in 1788, inherited the *Casa Comercial Torlades*. He was also involved with the *Companhia Lisbonense de Iluminação da Gás*, which began operations on 30th of July 1848 with the illumination of 26 gas lights in Lisbon,^{16,17} and also set up the *Casa Bancário Torlades Ltda*. One of José's great-granddaughters, Maria da Conceição Infante de Lacerda Pereira de Eça Custance O'Neill (1873-1932), was a writer, poet and journalist who played an important role in the *Conselho Nacional das Mulheres Portuguesas*, which advocated women's suffrage. One of her grandchildren was Alexandre O'Neill, a well-known poet and one of the founders of the Lisbon Surrealist Movement.

Carlos O'Neill built a house in the centre of Lisbon, on the Travessa de Guilherme Cossoul, in 1825. The O'Neill family lived there until 1839 when they moved to Rua das Flores after a thief (José do Telhado) had killed a servant and stolen some money.¹⁸ The house in Rua das Flores remained in the family until 1953 and was the birthplace of the present head of the family.

The O'Neills and Hans Christian Andersen

José Maria O'Neill was fluent in several languages and, like his father, served as the Consul-General for Denmark in Portugal. The Torlades company exported salt to the USA and to Scandinavia,¹⁹ which perhaps explains why his sons, José Carlos and Jorge Torlades, were sent to live in Denmark for four years during the Portuguese Civil War, where, in 1828, they met Hans Christian Andersen. They were to meet again in 1866 when the two brothers invited Andersen to visit Portugal and hosted him in Lisbon, Setúbal and Sintra.²⁰ In Lisbon, Andersen stayed at Jorge's Quinta, known as the *Quinta do Pinheiro* (presently the American Embassy), with a view from his bedroom window of the *Aqueduto das Águas Livres*. He described the building as an "old, somewhat dilapidated two-storey country-house, with rose-coloured walls, green-painted doors and window casements, as most of Lisbon's old houses".²¹ Andersen reported that Jorge was an accomplished pianist and that he accompanied his father, who had a good voice and sang arias from *Rigoletto* for Andersen. The hospitality offered to Andersen included, at the suggestion of Jorge,

¹⁴ Downey and O'Neill Teixeira, *op cit*

¹⁵ Carlos Mouro. *Notas sobre a indústria de curtumes setubalense*.

http://maeds.amrs.pt/informacao/MUSA/MUSA5/16%20Carlos%20Mouro_Ind%20Curtumes.pdf

¹⁶ O'Connell, *op cit*

¹⁷ <https://galpgasnaturaldistribuicao.pt/Quem-somos/Hist%C3%B3ria>

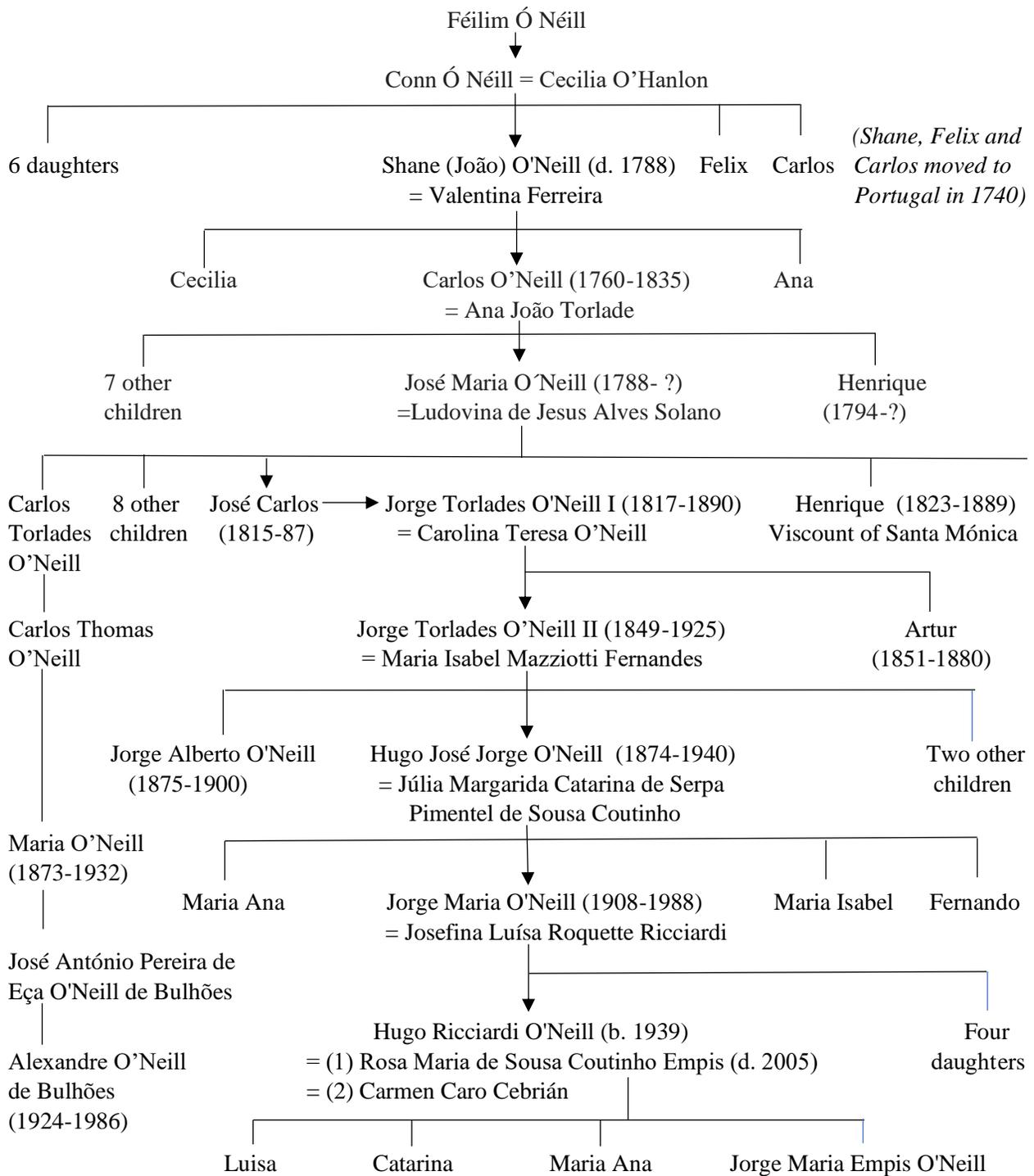
¹⁸ Downey and O'Neill Teixeira, *op cit*

¹⁹ Maria Isabel Andrade Baptista. *Casas com história e memória em Cascais*. <https://comum.rcaap.pt/handle/10400.26/4920>

²⁰ SAPO. *Há 150 anos H. C. Andersen em Portugal* 28 June 2016

²¹ Hans Christian Andersen. *A Visit to Portugal in 1866*. <http://online.fliphtml5.com/vrmcs/auvp/#p=1>

The O'Neill Clanaboy Dynasty in Portugal

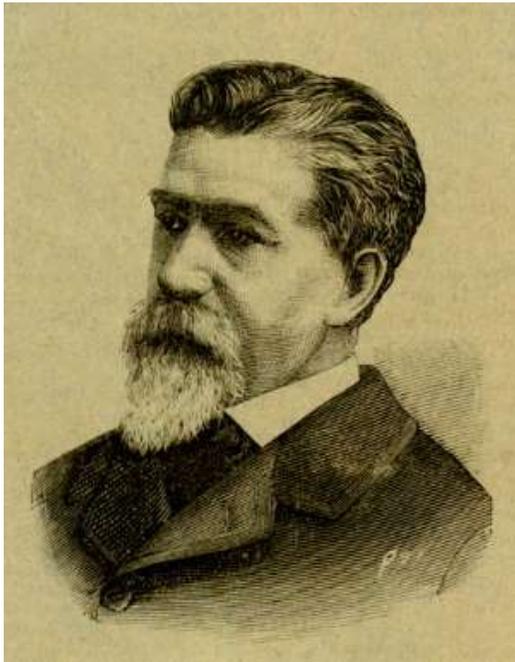


→ Head of the family

Source: Articles on family members in Wikipedia

a visit to a Lisbon brothel.²² In Sintra, he was hosted by José in his house at Santa Maria. In Setúbal, he stayed at the *Quinta dos Bonecos*, which had been established at the beginning of the 19th century by Carlos O'Neill.²³

While in Sintra, Andersen asked to meet with King D. Fernando II, who was staying at the Pena Palace. Jorge agreed to organise this on the condition that he would greet the King in Portuguese. For several weeks Andersen worked to perfect the pronunciation of the sentence that Jorge suggested. On the day they went up to the Palace it was crowded with people who wanted to welcome Andersen. He was introduced to the King. Andersen thanked him by saying the sentence Jorge had taught him, only for the people present to start roaring with laughter. The sentence was “*Vá Vossa Magestade lamber sabão*”.²⁴ Hans Christian was most upset because he didn't understand what had happened. He was appeased by the King laughing and explaining that it was caused by the eccentric sense of humour of his host.²⁵



Jorge Torlades O'Neill I



Henrique O'Neill, Viscount of Santa Mónica

The Viscount of Santa Mónica

José Carlos O'Neill, who was the first-born son of José Maria O'Neill, continued, together with his brother Jorge Torlades O'Neill I (1817-1890), to expand the business of *Casa Comercial Torlades*. José Carlos died childless in 1887 and was briefly succeeded as head of the family by his brother.²⁶ Another son of

²² Sven Hakon Rossel. *Hans Christian Andersen: Danish Writer and Citizen of the World*. p. 76

²³ It was later inherited by his grandson, the third son of José Maria, also named Carlos. The property was sold in 1912 by his son, Carlos Tomás O'Neill.

²⁴ Go lick soap, your majesty

²⁵ Hugo O'Neill, pers. comm.

²⁶ According to Loring, Jorge was quite a character. “And among the outside companions of my daily walks I can never forget the venerable banker, George Torlades O'Neill, one of the many generations who have occupied the old banking house, the representative of Torlades, whose dingy and well-worn quarters remind one of the Cheeryble Brothers, and whose appreciation of Spanish ballads, which he repeated with great spirit, gave a peculiar lustre to his fine accomplishments and his strong moral qualities. The rare O'Neill, with his loose-fitting garments, and his quaint office, and his glass of Copenhagen, and his six miles of a morning on his favorite little mare, and his fine varieties of port wine which he gathered up for his purchasers in Boston, and his

José Maria, Henrique O'Neill, initially pursued an academic career at the University of Coimbra before teaching in Germany. He was then invited by the Portuguese Minister of Justice to lead one of the branches of his ministry, eventually becoming Director-General of Justice, Prosecutor-General and Officer-Major of the Royal Household. For this work he was awarded the title of Viscount of Santa Mónica, the name Santa Mónica being chosen for his achievement in developing the Santa Mónica women's prison at Tires, on the site of a former monastery. Henrique was criticised by the family for having accepted a title of Viscount. They quoted to him the joke attributed to the poet of Irish descent, Almeida Garrett: *Foge cão que te fazem barão*, to which the dog replied, *mas para onde se me fazem visconde*.²⁷

Jorge O'Neill

On the death of Jorge Torlades O'Neill I in 1890, his elder son, Jorge Torlades O'Neill II (1849-1925), became the head of the O'Neill family in Portugal. At *Quinta do Pinheiro*, his father had received countless guests and Jorge O'Neill inherited from him a circle of friends such as the newspaper editor João Pinheiro Chagas, the writer Ramalho Ortigão, and the artist Rafael Bordalo. Jules Verne visited the Quinta on a couple of occasions, in 1878 and 1884. Jorge O'Neill II also entertained at his house in the Rua das Flores in Lisbon, where frequent visitors included the writer and politician Joaquim Pedro de Oliveira Martins. Rua das Flores was used from 1889 to host suppers of *Os Vencidos da Vida* (Life's Vanquished). This was a name used by an informal group of intellectuals to indicate, at the suggestion of Martins, that its members (previously known as the "Generation of 1870") had been defeated in their attempts to modernize the country. O'Neill became an "honorary vanquished", together with King D. Carlos I and the writer Maria Amália Vaz de Carvalho. From this time, he also became good friends with other *Vencidos da Vida*, such as the writer Eça de Queiroz and the Count of Sabugosa.²⁸

Jorge O'Neill II was a personal friend of King D. Carlos and an Honorary Officer-Major of the Royal Household. He was also a friend of Roger Casement, one of the leaders of the Easter Rising in Ireland, who spent several months in Lisbon in 1904. O'Neill donated money to the Irish Volunteers. In 2002, during the State Visit of Irish President Mary McAleese to Portugal, the present head of the family gave her letters sent to his great grandfather by Roger Casement asking him to return to Ireland and assume his O'Neill role. These letters are now available for consultation at the National Library in Dublin.²⁹

Speaking Danish, German and French, as well as Portuguese and English, Jorge continued to run the *Casa Comercial Torlades*, which became the *Sociedade Torlades* in 1897. At this time, it appears that outside capital was introduced into the business, with the two other managing partners being J.W.H. Bleck³⁰ and Manuel de Castro Guimarães.³¹ An advertisement in *The Times* in 1922 gave the company's address as 32 Rua Áurea, Lisbon, not far from the Praça do Comércio, and describes the business as "Steamship agents, coal and wheat importers". In that year, in addition to Jorge and his son, Hugo, the managing partners were then given as C.H. Bleck, W.E. Bleck, and D.L. de Lancastre. Jorge was also a Director of the *Banco de Portugal* and was on the Board of the *Companhia dos Telefones* (Anglo-Portuguese Telephone Company), and the *Companhia dos Caminhos-de-ferro Portugueses*.

In 1891, Portugal left the gold-standard and in 1892 the payment of the principal on foreign public debt and of two thirds of the interest, was suspended. *Casa Comercial Torlades* put together a bank syndicate, headed

integrity and his beaming eye and noble head and warm heart; he alone would make Lisbon a spot to be remembered by all whom he loved". In George Bailey Loring, *A Year in Portugal*. New York; London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1890, p. 286

²⁷ Hugo O'Neill, pers. comm. (*Run away dog, from those who'll make you a Baron. But where to, if they'll make me a Viscount?*)

²⁸ Andrade Baptista, op cit. p. 229

²⁹ Hugo O'Neill, pers. comm.

³⁰ Founder of the Lisbon Coal and Oil Fuel Company Limited to represent products of the Shell oil company in Portugal. He was also President of the British Chamber of Commerce in Lisbon

³¹ Denise Pereira and Gerald Luckhurst. *O programa estético da casa de Jorge O'Neill, a partir dos contributos de Luigi Manini, Francisco Vilaça e Albrecht Haupt*.

https://www.academia.edu/12350274/O_programa_est%C3%A9tico_da_casa_de_Jorge_O'Neill_a_partir_dos_contributos_de_Luigi_Manini_Francisco_Vila%C3%A7a_e_Albrecht_Haupt

by Baring Bros, to re-organise the long-term national debt, while Henrique Burnay guaranteed repayment of the final short-term loan. Burnay, in return, was granted the tobacco monopoly while O'Neill received the monopoly on match manufacturing, as part of a syndicate of larger manufacturers. He was Chairman of the Board of the new *Companhia Portuguesa de Fósforos*, while his partner, J.W.H. Bleck, former administrator of the *Companhia Nacional de Fósforos*, was also on the board. Matchmaking was carried out in very dangerous conditions and fires were common at factories throughout the country. Work on match production involved lengthy hours and exposure to toxic fumes. As a result of the monopoly, 69 match factories in the country were closed to create the *Companhia Portuguesa de Fósforos*, which opened two large factories; one in Lordelo do Ouro, in Porto, and another in Beato, in Lisbon.^{32,33}

Jorge O'Neill played an important role in Cascais society at a time when the Royal Family decided to spend part of its summer holidays there. He was a founder member of the elite Royal Sporting Club of Cascais in 1879, which included King D. Carlos amongst its members. In common with other members of the nobility, he decided to build a house in Cascais to be close to the King during the season, although he moved into his first house only on 3 November 1900, rather later than most.³⁴ That was the year when tragedy struck, when his second son, Jorge Alberto, was murdered.



View of the Torre de São Sebastião, with the Casa Santa Maria in the foreground (photo: author)



The Torre de S. Patrício (Casa Verdades de Faria), Estoril (photo: author)

Jorge built three houses in Cascais and Estoril, all of which are now museums. The first was the *Torre de S. Sebastião*, now the *Condes de Castro Guimaraes* Museum, which was constructed in 1900. In 1910, he sold the building to the 1st Count of Castro Guimaraes, a fellow shareholder of the *Sociedade Torlades* and a successful banker. This sale was because he was in financial difficulties,^{35,36} but a contributory factor may have been that, with the end of the monarchy in 1910, he had less of a need for a base in Cascais. The building contains several references to O'Neill's Irish heritage, such as shamrocks on the wrought iron door, the Shamrock Room, ceiling paintings, and the coat of arms of O'Neill on the roof of the turret. On the same plot on the opposite side of the inlet, he also built, in 1902, the *Casa de Santa Maria*, as a wedding

³² *Apogeu e queda de uma indústria notável*. <http://www.benfeita.net/texto11.htm>

³³ *Quando o Estado faminto quis ganhar dinheiro com fósforos*. <https://osaldahistoria.blogs.sapo.pt/quando-o-estado-faminto-quis-ganhar-18167>

³⁴ M. Gonçalves. *A Família de Jorge O'Neill: vivências e ambientes decorativos nas suas casas de veraneio* has some interesting photos of the early days of the house https://www.academia.edu/37509376/A_Fam%C3%ADlia_de_Jorge_ONeill_viv%C3%Aancias_e_ambientes_decorativos_nas_suas_casas_de_veraneio

³⁵ Andrade Baptista, *op cit*.

³⁶ <https://www.cascais-portugal.com/Attractions/Castro-Guimaraes-Museum-Cascais.html>

present for his daughter, Maria Teresa, who had married D. António de Avilez Lobo de Almeida de Melo e Castro in 1898. In 1918, Jorge built the *Casa Verdades de Faria* (originally known as the *Torre de S. Patrício*) in Monte Estoril. It was sold around 1942 and is now the *Museu da Música Portuguesa*.

Recent years

When Shane (João) O'Neill came to Portugal in the 1740s he brought with him a parchment manuscript signed by the Archbishop of Armagh, attesting to his right to be recognised as the male descendant of Murtough Devlinagh, Prince of Clanaboy (1548-1552), the last chief to be properly inaugurated according to the Old Irish laws of dynastic succession. Jorge O'Neill was recognized by the Ulster King of Arms as the male heir and was addressed by Popes Leo XIII and Pius X as Most Serene Prince of Clanaboy and recorded as such by the Registrar of Portuguese Nobility. He was invited to Ireland in 1925 to participate in Irish Independence Celebrations as "The O'Neill", the head of the House of O'Neill, but died that same year before he could attend.

Jorge's heir was Hugo José Jorge O'Neill (1874-1940). Hugo, an Officer in the Portuguese Navy, was a managing partner of the *Sociedade Torlades* when it went bankrupt in 1929 as a result of the Great Depression. This bankruptcy was followed by a lengthy court case. Hugo was succeeded by Jorge Maria O'Neill (1908-1988), who was an electrical engineer, having graduated from the University of Lausanne in Switzerland.

The present Head of the O'Neill family in Portugal, Hugo Ricciardi O'Neill (born 1939), continues to occupy the *Quinta das Machadas* in São Julião, Setúbal. He serves as Chairman of the Standing Council of Irish Chiefs and Chieftains and is recognized as "The O'Neill". He has been active in promoting understanding of the "unique political and social system of Gaelic Ireland and the essence of the values that formed the ancient Gaelic Culture".³⁷ He has been President of the National Association of Historic Houses (*Associação Portuguesa das Casas Antigas*), a Governor of the European Historic Houses Association, and Chairman of the *Clube Naval Setúbalense*, among other roles. His only son, and heir apparent, is Jorge Maria Empis O'Neill (born 1970).

³⁷ Hugo O'Neill's LinkedIn page. <https://www.linkedin.com/in/hugo-o-neill-2498a617/?originalSubdomain=pt>