

# THE BRITISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PORTUGAL

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## OPORTO BRITISH HOSPITAL

P. Sinclair

A British Hospital existed in Oporto in 1787 though it was used mainly for the treatment of ships' crews. By 1845 it seems that the hospital was reduced to a ward in the Santo António Hospital, that fine building designed by John Carr of York. The British Consul was one of the administrators together with a committee of merchants, supported by money levied under the Contribution act. Some time later the hospital was set up in Miragaia where a Doctor Jebb practised in 1858 and in 1900 a British doctor was in residence. This building overlooked the River Douro so nursing staff —and patients! — were able to wave to the ships sailing up the river, as a welcome to Oporto.

An appeal was made in 1933 for more involvement by members of the community: 'It needs your interest as well as your money'. Eventually the laws of the country were changed requiring doctors to hold a Portuguese medical degree, so from then on Portuguese doctors operated from the hospital, including a Doctor Magalhães in the 1950s.

During the war the British Hospital was represented on the British Emergency Council, helping in various ways.

In 1971, with the improvement in Portuguese hospitals it became no longer feasible to maintain a hospital for a dwindling community. Reluctantly the hospital was wound up and the building sold. Some of the equipment such as wheelchairs, zimmer frames etc were given to the Distressed British Subjects Fund —now the British Community Fund- where they are held

at the British Church of St James, and loaned out to those in need.

A charity shop, the Bom Marché, opened its doors in 1968 with the aim of fundraising to help the hospital. After the closure of the hospital it continued operating in the grounds of the British Consulate in the Avenida da Boavista. Funds were donated to the British Church and also to various Portuguese charities. This too wound up in 2005 with the closure of the British Consulate.

*PAT SINCLAIR arrived in Oporto from Edinburgh in 1960, newly married to Ian Sinclair who was working in the port trade. After teaching English and bringing up a family she is now the BHS representative in the north of Portugal.*