

PHSP14-1737

PORTUGAL IN 1775
The letters of Thomas Pelham

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An interesting hitherto unpublished account of a visit to Portugal in 1755 can be found in the Pelham papers in the British Library. The intention of this note is to publish the material that may be of interest to modern readers. The account is in the form of letters sent by Thomas Pelham. Pelham, second Earl of Chichester (1756-1826) was the eldest son of Thomas Pelham first Earl. He was educated at Westminster and Clare Hall, Cambridge, where he graduated MA in 1755. In the autumn of that year he set off on a grand tour that was to take him to Portugal, Spain, France, Italy and the Empire (Germany and Austria) from which he did not return until early 1778. Pelham began his travels by sailing to Portugal, an unconventional course that is explained by his invitation to stay with a family friend, Thomas Robinson, Earl of Grantham, Ambassador in Madrid. Pelham's letters from Lisbon can be found in the first volume of his private correspondence, Additional Manuscript 33126.

The first letter (folios 173-4) was written to his father on 28 October. It described his passage from Falmouth in the New York packet, *Captain Dashwood*. On this journey he was accompanied by Robert Darley Waddilove, Rector of Whitby, Grantham's chaplain and a scholar with marked bibliographical interests.

«We sailed from Falmouth with a very fair Wind on Sunday the 15th about 10 o'clock in the morning; on Monday the winds were contrary, on

Friday we saw Cape Finister but the winds continuing contrary with frequent squalls we were obliged to take a northwest course; on Saturday and Sunday we had the same teasing weather; on Tuesday the 24th we passed the Burlings and on Wednesday came in sight of the Rock of Lisbon; were becalmed that night laid the next at anchor in the mouth of the Tagus and arrived here about 3 o'clock in good health and spirits the 27th. ... I was walking deck like an old sailor without ever being in the [174] least sick after the first day, and that entirely owing to the nastiness of my fellow Passengers».

The letter was not sent on the 28th and was instead prolonged by a series of postscripts which lasted until 4 November. In this extended letter Pelham had full opportunity to reveal his variable and frequently inaccurate spellings which have not been altered in this account. He also expressed customary Whiggish sentiments though he was impressed by the strength of Catholic devotion as James Hume had been in France in 1714². The nature of Pelham's connections ensured that he was widely introduced. Pombal, the Portuguese first minister, had been envoy in London where he had been close to the Duke of Newcastle the effective foreign minister, and his brother Henry Pelham. Both were relatives of Thomas Pelham's father and the latter owed his position as MP for Sussex to Newcastle.

The postscript began on 29 October (folio 176).

«I have been this morning with Sir John Hort to the Chapel at Mr. Walpoles³ who was so kind as to carry me afterwards to the Sardinian ambassador and the Spanish the latter of whom invited me to dine with him tomorrow; I dined today with Sir John who procured a box for us to see a bull fight in the afternoon a ceremony which curiosity naturally makes one desirous of seeing though there is nothing entertaining in the whole spectacle; Mr. Walpole carried me to the King's opera which gave me greater pleasure than can be conceived; the orchestra is remarkable good and most of the singers; the scenery and dressers very expensive and rich but the dancing is very indifferent [177] and much inferior to the rest; there is one extraordinary circumstance in this opera that no ladies are admitted nor any women suffered to appear on the stage⁴. The men however so much resemble women that there is a report in Lisbon of Baptistina the first singer here receiving proposals from some Englishman who fell in love with him on the stage. I was introduced to Monsieur de Mello and sat next to him the whole evening; I disclosed your

letter to him and intend waiting on him tomorrow; he was most exceedingly gracious and very inquisitive concerning his friends in England and particularly of the success of his old party at Loo.

Mr.⁵ Waddilove and I set out this morning to see what we could of the town and its' environs; we first visited the aqueduct one of the finest works in the world, the architecture modern and reckoned very good, is carried over a very deep valley; the center arch is wide and high enough to admit of the largest man of war under full sail to stand in it; the sit off or cornish is between five and six feet in width or as is more usual to say wide enough to drive a coach and six upon it; from [178] hence we visited the Church of St. Roches the finest in Lisbon filled with exceeding fine pictures in mosaic done at Rome and several other very rich ornaments. ... with what joy and gratitude must every Englishman [179] reflect on the hapiness of his own nation in comparison of any other; when he sees in a country like this, the nobles from their greatness and tyranny exposed every hour to attacks from the People and the people from their poverty rendered the most abject slaves and religion which should be the basis of all kingdoms made their ruin; one can not however [?] the great zeal with which some of the poor wretches in this country embrace their religion without feeling ashamed for the Protestants, who have so much more light given them; so remiss and languid in their devotions; how happy would it be for us if we had strength of mind sufficient to enjoy their zeal without falling into their bigotry.

In our way to the Spanish Ambassador's to dinner we saw a very old Gothic monastery of the order of St. Jerome; it was originally intended for a palace, and was much damaged, by the earthquake. ... you will perhaps be a little surprized at our visiting men in the evening; but as people in Portugal dine at two o'clock it is as common to visit in the evening [180] as in the morning.

My⁶ time is so much taken up in visits etc. that I can only enjoy the pleasure of writing to you when I come home at night; I hope therefore you will excuse many little inaccuracies and in this long letter ... Tuesday; Sir John Hort and I in one chaise Mr Waddilove and Mr. Robson in another set out for Contra; we stopped in our way at the house of the Infante Don Pedro which is very magnificent and well calculated for night entertainments of which there are only four in the year; excepting on these days he lives there quite privately and the Royal Family are generally with him [181] some part of the summer we arrived at Cintra about two o'clock dined at the inn with Mr. Hope who is there

for his health and one or two other gentlemen; after dinner we sallied forth *all on asses* to see the rocks and to ascend the summit where there is a convent called Penna, from whence is seen the Tagus Lisbon and a most romantic prospect of twenty or thirty miles round; the Contra is a village, which may be well called the Paradise of Portugal for in summer when Lisbon is too hot to live in there is always a fine shade and fresh air from the sea; The rocks which are of a wonderful height are not only the most romantic and beautiful but the most extraordinary object that can be conceived; for the earth is all washed away from the top and there remains vast heaps of large stones some forty of fifty feet long resting upon each other that it appears more the work of art than of nature and yet the size of the stones immediately show the impossibility of any other power than that of nature being able to place them in the manner they are; — the earth that is washed from the tops of the hills necessarily makes the vallies and sides of these rocks very fertile. Cintra therefore and the other villages which are sheltered at the foot of them are exceedingly well wooded and afford the most delightful walks and rides amidst groves of orange trees, Portugal laurels, arbutus's, myrtle etc etc and though there are no oaks the elms and cork trees supply their place; on Wednesday we rode out on horse-back and visited the different villages and walks, in the neighbourhood the beauties of which it is impossible for me to describe; there are two places however I can not help mentioning; first the gardens of Penna Verdi which were laid out 200 years ago by Don John de Castres [182] (a relation to the famous Castras of America) and are in every respect conformable to the present taste in England; and secondly the palace or castle where the present King's grand-father murdered his brother, it is a moorish building and amidst some of the ornaments I found the honeysuckle so much in fashion at present and the same rooms in size though not fitted up; to some there are ceilings divided into compartments in which are painted swans, in another room they are all magpies from these ceilings. In one the compartments are filled with the arms of noble families who have served in war, and on the cornish is a handsome inscription to their memory in Portuguese signifying their deserts from their country and King in general not particularizing any.

We left Cintra on Thursday after Dinner, Sir John and I went to Wiris [?] the seat of the Marquis de Pombal in our way home who received us with the greatest politeness and attention; did me the honour to express how happy he should be in showing me any civility here in return for the great civility he met

with from the Duke of Newcastle and Mr. Pelham. we came in at about six in the evening and he would not part with us till ten, an audience not to be obtained by the first man in Portugal, and were there English printers in Lisbon it would be mentioned in all the papers and raise suggestions from the curious — the Marquis is a remarkable well-bred man and as you may easily imagine after having been so long minister and conversant with the affairs of all Europe a most agreeable companion; talked a great deal of the expulsion of the Jesuits out of Portugal and the attempt against his own life in the execution of it with the firmness and composure of an old [183] Roman; he offered to show me anything in this place and has given me a letter to Monsieur de Mello at Elvas with an order for me to see all the fortification in that place without any reserve;

I have this morning been with Mr. Walpole to see the foundry where everything was prepared for our reception by your friend Monsr. de Mello's orders; The master of the Ordinance and the head of the engineers with an aide de camp (who talked English) attended us, and showed every part of their works some of which are superior and indeed not known to most parts of Europe; the honour that have been shown me here are much greater than a person of my rank could possibly expect, and I hear that my visits to the people of rank and fashion have been well received and has pleased the people of the country.

I dined with Mr. Walpole and went in the evening to the long room which is very like the rooms at Brighton etc. it is supported by the factory, the meeting is every Friday, and all Portuguese and foreigners come by invitation which is a general one to those who reside here; — I was introduced to the Comte de Weris the Marquis' son at these rooms as he was not at home when I called on the Marquis.

... You will I am afraid be disappointed at my not giving you some account of the natives here; indeed it is impossible for a man even after six or seven years residence to mix with the bulk of the People; they are in general poor from the indolence that must necessarily follow so despotic a government [184] which prevents their giving any entertainments as there are no publick assemblies or theatre you seldom even see the nobles here but at the King's opera, where as I mentioned before only men are admitted and little possibility of conversing with those who are there. There are great many Scotch and Irish in this service; who meet with great encouragement.

I⁷ dined today with the Sardinian Ambassador and went with him afterwards to the Opera which I am more pleased with than before and the orchestra is allowed to be the finest in Europe».

The next letter was sent to his father on 23 November from the Escorial, where Pelham had arrived on the 21st. It gives a brief account (folios 207-8) of the journey from Lisbon to the Spanish frontier.

«We left aldeia — Galaga, the place we slept at on crossing the Tagus on Thursday the 9th drawn by six mules with bells and rope harness and at the rate of a stage wagon for we in general set off before night in which time we used to go between 20 and 30 miles English. We passed through a very stony barren country; cultivated only a little near the towns till we came to Elvas on Friday the 12th 11 o'clock — I had here a letter from the Marquis of Pombal with orders to see the fortifications. Accordingly I went to the Governor (Mr. de Mello brother to your friend) who received me with the greatest politeness but did not understand a word of any language but his own; he sent therefore for a Frenchman who was a general officer in the Portuguese service, as an interpreter; After some little conversation and inviting me to dinner the Governor ordered his carriage and sent me with this general officer to see the fortifications and armories etc. which are indeed very fine and from this gentleman's kind information on different points entertained me much. We returned to dinner about two; and set out again about three in his carriage with led horses and another officer [208] who talked English to Fort Lellippe at about a mile from the town; the finest thing of the sort, perhaps in the world. It is not quite complete though all the essential parts are finished; ... we returned again to the Governors supped there and set out on our journey the next morning. On the 13th then we got into Spain which was in the parts we were in much more cultivated than Portugal though very similar in many spots».

Notes

1. *Dictionary of National Biography* 15 (1888) p. 697. Pelham's account was used in J. M. Black, *The British and the Grand Tour* (London, 1985).
2. Black, *Grand Tour* p. 191.
3. Honourable Robert Walpole, Envoy Extraordinary 1771-1800.
4. For other criticisms of opera on this score, Black, *Grand Tour*, p. 205.
5. Beginning of 30 October postscript.
6. Beginning of 3 November postscript.
7. Beginning of 4 November postscript, folio 184.