

Portuguese state and official visits to the United Kingdom during the reign of Queen Elizabeth II

This article summarises the visits made to the United Kingdom by Portuguese Heads of State during the first seventy years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth II.

By Andrew Shepherd¹

Introduction

Queen Elizabeth II has made two state visits to Portugal. The first was in 1957 and the second in 1985. Both visits have been covered by articles published by the Society.² During her reign there have been five state or official visits to the United Kingdom by Portuguese presidents. These were:

- State visit by Francisco Craveiro Lopes in October 1955.
- State visit by António Ramalho Eanes in November 1978.
- State visit by Mário Soares in April 1993.
- Official visit by Jorge Sampaio in February 2002.
- Official visit by Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa in November 2016.

Leaving aside António de Spínola and Costa Gomes, who were both briefly president following the Carnation Revolution in 1974, there were two long-serving presidents who did not make a state or official visit to the United Kingdom, Américo Tomás and Aníbal Cavaco Silva. Tomás was a figurehead of Oliveira Salazar who was much derided and, moreover, was an inept speaker. It can be speculated that even if he had wanted to visit London, Salazar would not have allowed it. The reason why Cavaco Silva did not undertake an official visit is not known. He did carry out numerous visits to other countries and in June 1999 went to Edinburgh to receive an honorary doctorate from Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh. That university now awards an annual prize, named after Cavaco Silva, to the best student in economic policy.³

Visit by Francisco Craveiro Lopes, 1955

Francisco Craveiro Lopes was the *Estado Novo*'s presidential candidate in 1951, being eventually returned unopposed. He was thus president in 1953 when Queen Elizabeth II was crowned. However, he did not attend the coronation as there is a tradition that heads of foreign states (other than members of the Commonwealth) do not attend the event.

The state visit two years later by Craveiro Lopes and the First Lady, Berta Ribeiro, was conducted with considerable pomp. They arrived by a Portuguese naval vessel, *Bartolomeu Dias*, which was accompanied by three other Portuguese naval vessels and three ships of the British navy, with which they had rendezvoused off Plymouth. The *Bartolomeu Dias* moored in the Pool of London and the couple formally began the visit on 25 October 1955 by travelling up the Thames from the Tower of London on a Royal Barge, to be met by the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh at Westminster Pier. The welcoming party included all the leading members of the Royal Family, including Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, and Princess Margaret. A Pathé News report did not hesitate to note that the President was "only 5ft tall". The Queen and the President and other members of the party then proceeded to

¹ I am grateful to the Chairman of the British Historical Society of Portugal, Edward Godfrey, for having suggested this topic.

² See: Armando Marques Guedes. 2006. *Queen Elizabeth's Visit to Portugal 1957*. BHSP Annual Report 33. <https://www.bhspportugal.org/library/articles/the-queens-visit-to-portugal-1957> and J.M. Woolley. 1986. *The Queen's Visit, March 1985*. <https://www.bhspportugal.org/library/articles/the-queens-visit-march-1985>

³ Presidency of the Portuguese Republic. 2016. *Scotland's Heriot-Watt University instituted the Aníbal Cavaco Silva Prize for the best student in Economic Policy*. <https://anibalcavacosilva.arquivo.presidencia.pt/index.php?idc=10&idi=43268&idl=2>

Buckingham Palace in an open-carriage procession. The Pathé report stressed that although state visits were not uncommon, the full pageantry accorded to Craveiro Lopes was rarely seen, and that Londoners had turned out in force to watch the colourful occasion, which was “a fitting tribute to Britain’s oldest ally”.⁴

Craveiro Lopes and his wife stayed at Buckingham Palace and gave the Queen a presentation dinner service, specially commissioned by the Portuguese government from the *Vista Alegre* company.⁵ They attended a state banquet at the Palace, were received by the Queen Mother at Clarence House, laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey, and were hosted for lunch by the Lord Mayor of London at the Guildhall. Following a dinner at the Portuguese Embassy for the Queen and Duke, the British Government hosted a Gala Performance of Smetana’s Opera, *The Bartered Bride*, at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.⁶ The Royal Family’s tiaras were much in evidence, as identified by a recent website.⁷



The Queen and President Craveiro Lopes heading for Buckingham Palace

One of the main reasons for the visit of Craveiro Lopes was to open what was to be an extremely successful exhibition at the Royal Academy in Burlington House, called “The Art of Portugal”, covering Portuguese works of art from 800 to 1800. As explained by Angela Delaforce in an article for the Society, this had been put together in just eight months by Reynaldo dos Santos, helped by his friendship with Salazar and with the banker and collector Ricardo Espírito Santo, who persuaded Salazar, at the last minute, to allow the *Custódia de Belém* (Belém Monstrance) to travel. Many private collectors loaned their works. Also at Burlington House was an exhibition on the Anglo-Portuguese Alliance.⁸

⁴ Pathé News. 1955. Portuguese President arrives.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hElaiQ2jyVg&ab_channel=BritishPath%C3%A9

⁵ Anglo-Portuguese News, Issue 629, 7 February 1957, page 6.

⁶ *O Globo*. 1955. *A visita do Presidente do Portugal á Inglaterra*.

⁷ <https://royalwatcherblog.com/2017/06/01/portuguese-state-visit-to-the-uk-1955/>

⁸ Angela Delaforce. *An Anniversary - The Art of Portugal at the Royal Academy in London*.

<https://www.bhsportugal.org/library/articles/an-anniversary-the-art-of-portugal-at-the-royal-academy-in-london>

Craveiro Lopes had been a Portuguese Air Force Officer and on 27 October he took the opportunity to visit RAF Harwell. Meanwhile, his wife visited a crèche and a care home in London and the Wallace Collection at Hertford House. The visit ended on 28 October.⁹

Visit by António Ramalho Eanes

From 1955 until after the demise of the *Estado Novo* there were no state or official visits. There were, however, visits at the political level, including one by the prime minister, Marcelo Caetano, in July 1973. This was ostensibly to commemorate the treaty between Portugal and England, which was signed in 1373 in St. Paul's Cathedral by D. Fernando, King of Portugal, and Edward III, King of England, but was really designed to promote Portugal's international respectability at a time when it was being internationally criticised for its colonial policy. The visit attracted considerable protest, including a famous placard stating "Grocer meets Butcher".¹⁰

The visit by Ramalho Eanes was the first state or official visit after the Revolution. President Eanes and his wife, Manuela, flew to London, arriving at Gatwick on 14 November 1978, where they were welcomed by the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester and by the Duchess of Norfolk, in her role as Lord-Lieutenant of West Sussex. They then took the train to Victoria station, where they were met by the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh, the Prince of Wales and Princess Anne, together with other members of the Royal Family.¹¹ Salutes were fired from Hyde Park and from the Tower of London, and they then proceeded to Buckingham Palace in a seven-carriage procession, along a route lined by the Armed Forces. In the afternoon, the President and his wife laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior, received Addresses of Welcome from the Greater London Council and the City of Westminster, and visited the Queen Mother at Clarence House, before attending a state banquet at Buckingham Palace.¹²



President Eanes and the Queen at the Buckingham Palace banquet

On 16 November, prime minister Margaret Thatcher went to Buckingham Palace to meet with the president. Eanes and his wife then travelled to Bracknell. On the face of it, this was a strange choice of location to visit, until it is remembered that Bracknell was one of Britain's "New Towns", which could

⁹ *O Globo*, op cit

¹⁰ Norrie MacQueen and Pedro Aires Oliveira. 2010. 'Grocer meets Butcher': Marcelo Caetano's London visit of 1973 and the last days of Portugal's *Estado Novo*. *Cold War History*, Vol. 10, No. 1. "Grocer" was the disparaging name used by the satirical magazine *Private Eye* to describe the British Prime Minister, Edward Heath.

¹¹ The Queen and Family Members Welcome Portugal's President Eanes.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=phbO_LfhALg&ab_channel=APArchive

¹² Court Circular 14 November 1978. *The Times*, 15 November

perhaps have been seen as a potential model for Portugal's future development. They then visited the University of Reading farm and horticultural station. In the early evening they attended a reception for the Portuguese community in the United Kingdom, before hosting a dinner at the Portuguese Embassy for the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh.¹³

Eanes gave a press conference and made a favourable impression on the British press. Noting his mastery of Portugal's policies, *The Times* wrote that he was flying back to Portugal looking "less like a ceremonial head of state and more like a political leader", although the same article considered that the President had done nothing to allay the fears of some in Portugal that the country was moving towards a "Gaullist system of government".¹⁴

Visits by Mário Soares

Although President Soares did not make a state visit to Britain until 1993, he did make an earlier visit, accompanied by the then prime minister, Anibal Cavaco Silva, not long after Soares was elected by a narrow margin in February 1986. May 1986 marked the 600th anniversary of the signing by the two countries of the Treaty of Windsor on 9 May 1386, although they had signed a preliminary agreement on the Treaty in 1373, as noted above. A thanksgiving service, attended by the Queen and the President, was held at St George's Chapel in Windsor to commemorate the Alliance. Despite hiccups in the relationship over the years, as the Duke of Wellington observed at a reception after the service: "Although rivals, Britain and Portugal were never enemies and never exchanged a shot."¹⁵

The need for such a ceremony to celebrate an ancient treaty might be questioned, particularly as 1986 was also the year in which Portugal joined the European Community. However, as pointed out in an article by the Society's former chairman, Paulo Lowndes Marques, Portugal had relied heavily on the advice of the United Kingdom in the 20th century, particularly during the First Republic after the overthrow of the monarchy in 1910. In turn, Portugal reciprocated; reluctantly during the Second World War in 1943 when Salazar agreed to allow Lajes airfield to be used by Allied forces, and more willingly in 1982, when the country agreed to permit use of Lajes by the British during the Falklands War, but only if the request were made under the terms of the Treaty of Windsor.¹⁶

During his 1986 visit Soares received an honorary doctorate from the University of Lancaster, both as an acknowledgement of his own achievements and as a celebration of the 600th anniversary of the Alliance. This marked the beginning of an ongoing cooperation between the university and Portugal that still continues. In June 2018 a strategic partnership was established with NOVA University, Lisbon to explore joint initiatives in research, teaching and knowledge exchange.¹⁷

The state visit by Soares began on 27 April 1993. He and his wife, Maria Barroso, also arrived in London at Victoria station, where they were met by the Queen, other members of the Royal Family and members of the Cabinet. Soares then travelled with the Queen in a 1902 open landau carriage to Buckingham Palace, along a route lined by police officers in white gloves. Like his two predecessors on state visits, Soares was fortunate with the London weather, as there was bright sunshine. He later made the obligatory trip to Westminster Abbey to lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior.¹⁸

That evening the couple attended a state banquet at Buckingham Palace. It attracted some attention in the press, not because of the Portuguese president but because it was the first official engagement that the Prince of Wales and Princess Diana had been present at together that year, as their separation had already been formally announced. According to the Daily Mirror, the invitation to Princess Diana came directly from the Queen and she omitted to tell other members of the Royal Family. The Prince of Wales

¹³ Court Circular, 16 November 1978. *The Times*, 17 November

¹⁴ RTP. 1978. *Conferência de Imprensa de Ramalho Eanes em Londres*. <https://arquivos.rtp.pt/conteudos/conferencia-de-imprensa-de-ramalho-eanes-em-londres/>

¹⁵ *The Times*. 1986. *Anglo-Portuguese treaty celebrated*. 13 November.

¹⁶ Paulo Lowndes Marques. 2002. *The Alliance in the XXth Century*. BHSP Annual Report 29. <https://www.bhsportugal.org/library/articles/the-alliance-in-the-xxth-century>

¹⁷ <https://arquivos.rtp.pt/conteudos/doutoramento-honoris-causa-de-mario-soares-6/>

¹⁸ *The Times*. 1993. *Queen toasts long friendship with Portugal*. 28 April

and the Queen Mother were reportedly “furious”.^{19,20} At the Banquet, the Queen noted that the Alliance took more forms than just exploration and mutual security. “Our histories have drawn us together, not merely when exploring the world but also in fulfilment of a no-less-important human need for relaxation and good company – one which I hope will be well satisfied tonight. I have in mind, of course, the most widely enjoyed product of our cooperation, port wine.”²¹



The Times, 28 April 1993

The Queen had said of 1992 that it was her “annus horribilis”, as a result of marital difficulties faced by her children and, in particular, the fire at Windsor Castle in November. During the visit by Soares, it was announced that Buckingham Palace would open to the public, for an entrance fee of £8.00. The proceeds would help fund the restoration of Windsor Castle.

Visit of Jorge Sampaio

President Sampaio was accompanied to the United Kingdom by his wife, Maria José Ritta. Their visit began on 12 February 2002, which was unfortunate as Princess Margaret had died three days earlier. Nevertheless, Sampaio and his wife had a very full and seemingly hectic programme. On the first day, they met with the Queen, with both Her Majesty and Ritta being dressed in black. They laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior and later met the Lord Mayor of Westminster. A meeting was held with the Anglo-Portuguese Society and a reception was also given for the Portuguese community in the United Kingdom. The President inaugurated a statue of Henry the Navigator in the garden of Belgrave

¹⁹ *Guardian*. 1993. *Old allies go hand in glove*. 28 April

²⁰ *Daily Mirror*. 2019. *Why Queen invited Princess Diana to banquet after separation - and 'it made royals furious'*. <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/queen-invited-princess-diana-banquet-16213405>

²¹ *The Times*, 1993, op cit

Sampaio and the couple visited the artist Paula Rego in her studio. Sampaio also met with prime minister, Tony Blair, at 10 Downing Street.²²



President Sampaio meets the Queen, three days after the death of Princess Margaret

On the 13th, the President made two presentations at the Portuguese Embassy. The BBC World Service was given the *Ordem da Liberdade*, while Amnesty International received the *Ordem de Mérito*. He and his wife then visited the Hungerford Project in Camden, a counselling and referral service for people with drug problems; the National Institute for Medical Research in Mill Hill; and Logoplaste UK, a subsidiary of a company headquartered in Cascais. Finally, they were guests of the Lord Mayor of London at a dinner in their honour, held at the Guildhall. On the 14th they travelled to Scotland, addressed the Scottish Parliament, and met with the First Minister, Jack McConnell. They visited Edinburgh Castle and also met with the Caledonian Portuguese Association.²³

Visit by Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa

The visit by Rebelo de Sousa was the shortest of the five visits, lasting only two days, on the 16th and 17th of November 2016. He was accompanied by the Minister of Finance, Mário Centeno, the Secretary of State for European Affairs, Margarida Marques and the Secretary of State for the Portuguese Communities, José Luís Carneiro.

The President met with the prime minister, Theresa May. This was, of course, after the Brexit referendum and Mrs May emphasised that the UK would be triggering Article 50 to formally initiate the process of leaving. According to a Downing Street press release, she said the UK was “leaving the EU but not leaving Europe, and that the UK would be approaching negotiations in a spirit of good will and pragmatism”. Rebelo de Sousa also had meetings with City businessmen, bankers and investors, before a Guildhall lunch hosted by the Lord Mayor of London. The *Observador* noted that the UK was the fourth largest destination for Portuguese exports, and that Portugal had a trade surplus with the UK. At the time, there were over 200,000 Portuguese citizens registered with the Portuguese consulates in London and Manchester, with the embassy estimating that the total number of Portuguese in the UK was around 500,000. Rebelo de Sousa had a meeting with representatives of the Portuguese community,

²² Arquivo Histórico da Presidência da República. *Visita oficial do Presidente da República, Jorge Sampaio, e da Senhora Dona Maria José Ritta ao Reino Unido da Grã-Bretanha e Irlanda do Norte, de 12 a 14 de fevereiro de 2002.*

<https://www.arquivo.presidencia.pt/details?id=129477&detailsType=Description>

²³ Arquivo Histórico, op cit

and also visited the studio of Paula Rego on the second morning of his visit. This has, of course, not been the President's only visit to the UK during his presidency, although others have not been classed as official visits. His latest visit was in October 2021, when he attended the Paula Rego exhibition at Tate Britain.^{24,25}



President Rebelo de Sousa is greeted by the Queen in November 2016

The meeting with the Queen took place on the second afternoon of the visit. The initial greetings were recorded for television, and then the Queen and the President retired for a private talk. During the recorded discussion the Queen was amused when Rebelo de Sousa told her that he had gone to Terreiro do Paço (Praça do Comércio) in Lisbon to see her and the Duke of Edinburgh arrive for her first state visit in 1957, “when I was a child”.²⁶ “I’m sure you were”, she replied. During her 1985 state visit, Rebelo de Sousa had been invited to dinner on the Royal Yacht Britannia, in his capacity as president of the *Partido Social Democrata*.²⁷

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²⁴ *Observador*. 2016. *Em visita oficial a Londres, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa encontra-se com financeiros e primeira-ministra*.

<https://observador.pt/2016/11/16/em-visita-oficial-a-londres-marcelo-rebelo-de-sousa-encontra-se-com-financeiros-e-primeira-ministra/>

²⁵ RTP. 2021. *Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa visitou exposição de Paula Rego na Tate Britain*.

https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/cultura/marcelo-rebelo-de-sousa-visitou-exposicao-de-paula-rego-na-tate-britain_v1357772

²⁶ He was 8.

²⁷ Presidência da República Portuguesa. 2016. *Presidente da República encontrou-se com Rainha Isabel II*.

<https://www.presidencia.pt/atualidade/toda-a-atualidade/2016/11/presidente-da-republica-encontrou-se-com-rainha-isabel-ii/>