

BHSP3-1976

**RECORDS OF THE ENGLISH FACTORY AT LISBON:
A UNIQUE SURVIVAL**

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Students of Anglo-Portuguese relations and those curious to learn about our forebears and the conditions in which they lived in Lisbon will be interested to know that a book, a unique record of their activities, has recently come into the keeping of this Society. It is the last Journal recording the transactions of the English Factory in Lisbon and it is unique because, although the Factory had existed since the beginning of the 17th century, and probably earlier, and is known to have kept records for much of that time, this is the only minute book which has so far been found.

The Factory, so-called because it was an association of factors, or commercial agents and merchants, had long been the centre and controlling body of British subjects living in and around Lisbon. It had acquired considerable power and had been accorded many privileges by the local government, the measure of its importance having been endorsed by the British Act of Parliament of 1721 which empowered the Factory to collect a tax on goods imported by British traders into Lisbon from Great Britain and its dominions. From this tax was formed the Contribution Fund out of which the Factory paid the charitable, social and commercial expenses of the community.

In 1789 the Factory accepted the offer of one of its members, Gerard DeVisme, to finance the rebuilding of the British Factory Hospital. A sub-committee was formed to oversee this project and a separate minute book — «Gerard DeVisme Esquire's Hospital Committee Book 1789» — was opened. The new Hospital was completed by the end of 1793, the final minute recording the fact being dated 13 January, 1794⁽¹⁾. The minute book, only partly used, was then put away.

(1) V. «The British Hospital in Lisbon», published by this Society, p. 28.

At the end of 1807 a French army under General Junot invaded Portugal and occupied Lisbon. British property was sequestered and some British subjects imprisoned. The invasion had not come as a surprise, however, and there had been time for the British authorities to take precautionary measures. Amongst these was the despatch to England, with the retiring British Consul, James Gambier, of «the Factory Journals subsequent to 17th February 1749, a period of 58 years.» Curiously enough, the Journals of an earlier date, covering the period 31 July 1715 to 17 February 1749, were not taken by Gambier and they «were laid before the Factory» by John Bell, the Pro-Consul General, at the first meeting of the Factory after the expulsion of the French, held on 15 November 1808. What happened to them after the meeting is not known and they have never been found.

The Journals taken by Gambier have also disappeared; they were said to have been lost by ship-wreck on their way to England, but there has been no evidence to support this statement. Gambier himself arrived safely, later to continue a colourful career in Rio de Janeiro and elsewhere.

Fortunately for posterity the Hospital Committee Book had not been amongst those entrusted to Gambier. It was produced at the meeting of 15 November 1808, and the members «resolved to enter their proceedings in the meantime into this book as a Subsidiary Journal»; and this is the book which has now come into the Society's keeping. It is a handsome volume, bound in calf and in an excellent state of preservation. As is the case with many of these old records, the handwriting is, for the most part, beautiful, and the stately English of the period is a joy to read. With the later Journals, which are already in our possession, the activities of the British Community from 1809 up to the abolition of the Contribution Fund in 1825 are revealed in their original detail.

The records in the second part of this book cover two years of critical importance during the Peninsular War. At the first meeting of the Factory after the departure of the French, above mentioned, John Bell produced his letter of appointment as Commissary for Prisoners of War, left him by the departing British Envoy, Viscount Strangford, in November 1807, and also the letter of his recent appointment as British Consul General by Sir Harry Burrard, Commander-in-Chief of the British forces in Portugal at the time. The Factory then got down to what was probably its former routine, dealing with finance, the distribution of charity, custom-house business, the Hospital and Burying Ground, and also some matters arising out of the French occupation. A surprising decision, under the circumstances, was the Factory's refusal to allow their Hospital

to be used for patients of the British army, «except in case of absolute necessity.»

A new Consul, John Jeffery, was sent out from England to replace John Bell early in 1809. He was an exceptionally able man and held the post until 1822 ⁽¹⁾.

For some months the minutes give a picture of the domestic transactions of the Factory, hardly any mention being made of the war until after the Battle of Talavera when, on 25 October 1809, the Factory sent the Allied Commander-in-Chief, Lord Wellington, an address of congratulation on his victories at the Battles of Roliça, Vimeiro, the crossing of the Douro and the Battle of Talavera. Wellington replied the same day.

The first cloud appears on the Factory's horizon on 6 August 1810 when the Consul laid before the members a copy of the Treaty which had been signed on 19 February at Rio de Janeiro between Great Britain and Portugal, which abolished all English Factories in Portuguese territory. The members, who appear to have had no inkling of the matter, must have been dumbfounded by the news, their first reaction being that «as the act of ratification of the Treaty did not appear they considered it premature to offer any opinion on it.» Three weeks later, however, they were informed that an ordinance was being printed by the Portuguese Government directing that the articles of the Treaty should be immediately carried into effect, and the meeting was adjourned until 5 September for the members to consider the matter. That meeting was never held; a more immediate crisis had supervened.

The third French invasion of Portugal, this time under Marshall Massena had started in June 1810. The invaders' progress was leisurely and by 27 September they had only reached as far south as Buçaco, where Wellington's Anglo-Portuguese army severely checked them. Their advance continued, however, as Wellington retired to his prepared defensive position covering Lisbon, the Lines of Torres Vedras, which were, at their nearest point, no more than 20 miles from the Capital. This position the Allied field army entered on 10 October. The members of the Factory, no doubt unaware of the strength of the Lines or even, probably, of their existence, were greatly disturbed by this turn of events. Their anxiety can have been in no way alleviated when the Consul called a meeting of the Factory on 6 October at which he read a letter from Admiral Berkeley, Commander-in-Chief of His Majesty's Naval Forces in the Tagus, saying that «although an auspicious termination

of the present crisis may be expected», it would be as well to take every precaution. «I therefore deem it necessary», he continued, «to request you will apprise the British Merchants and others whom it may concern, that although it is my most anxious wish to afford every protection to those who might wish to embark themselves or their effects, that it is not in my power to accommodate them with any part of the Transport Tonnage in this river, (...) as it is scarcely sufficient and will be entirely occupied in providing for the exigencies of His Majesty's Services (...) they must therefore look forward to provide for themselves.»

The Factory now went into action. They nominated nine members to sit in groups of three in continuous session; they petitioned the Minister to press the authorities to allow goods to be withdrawn from Customs and to have any duty, already paid, refunded; they obtained an advance of £1,000 from the Treasury to help meet the cost of evacuating an estimated 250 British subjects who would need assistance; they found five small vessels available for charter, bought stores to provision them, and looked round for possible American vessels to hire. Admiral Berkeley then advised the Consul that there might, after all, be some empty transports available for use by British evacuees; only to cancel the notice a few days later when a large body of French prisoners of war, who had fought at Buçaco, arrived from Oporto!

This crisis abated when, on 14 November, the French began their withdrawal northwards from before the Lines. The number of applicants seeking passages to England dropped to 15, and it was decided this small number did not warrant chartering a vessel.

By the end of November the other crisis was also resolved, but not in so satisfactory a manner. On 30 November, John Jeffery, the Consul, called a meeting of the Factory and addressed the members as follows:

«(...) with respect to the Treaty of Commerce concluded between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, with Portugal, at the Rio de Janeiro on the 19th day of February last, particularly the 25th Article wherein His Majesty consents to waive the right of creating Factories or incorporated Bodies of British Merchants under any name or description whatsoever within His Royal Highness the Prince Regent's Dominions, and that in consequence he considers himself not warranted in summoning any future Meeting under the denomination of a Factory, and that in his opinion this Factory by the said 25th Article is virtually abolished; and that His Excellency Charles Stuart, His Majesty's Envoy (...) (entertained) the same opinion of the Factory being thereby abolished.»

So ended the «jollie, free Factory» which, for 200 years, had brought great benefits to Anglo-Portuguese trade.

⁽¹⁾ See Annual Reports of The Historical Association Lisbon Branch: Fifth Annual Report, pp. 325-38, and Seventh Annual Report, pp. 468 and 485. See also *The Wreck of the «Abeona Transport»* in this Report.