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RECOLLECTIONS OF ROYAL VISITS TO LISBON 1905



The Duke and Duchess of Connaught and Members of the Royal Family

Mrs. Susan Marques telephoned to me about a fortnight ago and asked me to come here to-day and talk about the visit of the Duke and Duchess of Connaught, and their two daughters, at the beginning of this century. I realize she did this knowing that I am one of the only four - or five at the most - of the British Colony who have lived in Lisbon for over 80 years, and are still alive, but I told her that, apart from not having, "the gift of the Gab", I was too young then to have distinct memories of that occasion. Still she persisted that in that case I must talk about subsequent British Royal visits - this in view of the Duke of Edinburgh's approaching visit and to fit in with the general atmosphere of the Anglo-Portuguese Alliance celebrations.

So persistent was she that in desperation I agreed to give you my faint personal impressions - no Court Circular - of earlier Royal visits, and more vivid ones of the last, feeling, however, that I am here on false pretences, as I know so little about the former and presume that many of you know as much as I do about the last.

The only thing I remember about the Connaught visit was being one of the children who sold programmes at an amateur performance by members of the Colony in the D. Maria Theatre, at which the Duke and Duchess and the two Princesses were present; and yet I also recollect my childish amazement when I heard an officer from the man-of-war, on which they travelled, telling my parents that the Duchess smoked a pipe! As in those days cigarette smoking was not yet the usual womanly practice it is to-day, and I had only heard of old peasant women smoking pipes, this one remained impressed on my mind.

King Edward VII was the first British king to pay a state visit to Portugal, so everything was done to make it a memorable occasion, with a very full programme for the 5 days from April 2nd until April 7th in 1903. The cortege from the Black Horse Square, where the king landed from the Royal Yacht "Victoria & Albert", took nearly an hour and a half to reach the Necessidades Palace. It went through densely crowded streets where windows were let at high prices and even the S. Justa elevator was used as a stand.

The British community had quite a big share in the programme of which I got some details from my father of the part he took. A colony deputation presented the King with a silver case at the British Embassy after which he drove down to the British Club, then located in the palatial building which is now the headquarters of the Portuguese Red Cross. Here he granted the Club the right to be called the "Royal British Club". I remember that my father was again struck by the King's very pronounced lisp.

On the Sunday, he attended a Service at St. George's Church. The choir had 26 so-called singers that day - I say "so-called" because I knew most of them and many had no idea of singing so had never sat there before, or would after, but got the best view of the King from there.

He spent a day in Sintra lunching at the Pena Castle and going to Tea at Montserrat as a guest of General Sartorius and his wife, relations of the absent proprietor, Sir Francis Cook. The journeys to and from Sintra were by special trains; there were no cars in those days.

A visit to the Irish Dominican Convent of Bom Sucesso was yet another of the King's British contacts, and a Mr. Clift, who ran a British school in Lisbon and considered himself a poet, succeeded in presenting the King with one of his effusions in a manuscript illuminated by his pupils. Poor old Mr. Clift's prolific works were known as Clift's "odious odes".

Reviewing troops, watching a bullfight and pigeon shooting, a visit to the Geographical Society, luncheons, banquets and tea with the Queen Mother, D. Maria Pia, at the Ajuda Palace, filled most of the 5 days, but Edward VII still found some time to drive around Lisbon with his inseparable friend, the Marquez de Soveral. Finally, on Tuesday afternoon, after entertaining King D. Carlos, whom he addressed as "Sir, My Brother and Dear Cousin", to lunch on the "Victoria & Albert", he sailed off to Gibraltar.

From groups and other photographs taken during this week, the two stout monarchs, who shared many tastes, appear to have had a very happy time together. The Royal British Club and the Parque Eduardo VII remain as lasting memorials of the visit.

In 1908, Queen Alexandra came to Lisbon on a state visit. I was still in the schoolroom, but remember all the excitement, especially as my small sister had been one of two children chosen to hand bouquets to her and to the Portuguese Queen, D. Amelia. My sister, however, did not rise to the occasion as, on the day before the visitor was due, a cold, which it was hoped would be gone in time, turned out to be measles, and a small substitute had to be found at the last moment.

Queen Alexandra's visit was announced at very short notice to take place only a week before a long announced visit from the Kaiser, so that the few intervening days were barely enough to take down British colours and to put up black, white and red decorations. In fact, many simple folk thought the poor bands had not had time to learn the German national anthem and had therefore continued to play the British one for the Kaiser; they were not aware that both national anthems had the same tune then. Incidentally, I only heard recently that the Swiss national anthem is also sung to the tune of "God Save the Queen".

Benches and chairs were placed in the Club garden facing part of the road along which the cortege passed, and from here Club members and their families cheered the two queens as they drove past. Both looked lovely, but I remember looking, in vain, for the enamel with which I had heard so often her face was covered! She drove the whole way in one of those beautiful creaking coaches from the Belem Museum. Nowadays, distinguished state visitors are spared prolonged discomfort and, as in the case of Queen Elizabeth, change into modern cars about half way to avoid the hefty jerks and bumps of the lovely old museum pieces.

As my mother was ill at the time, my father arranged to go to an evening function at the Palace with the very popular Vice-President of the Inglezinhos College, and I remember so well the hired carriage arriving to

fetch my father with a message that Father Singleton was called to a deathbed and could not go to the Palace.

Regarding Queen Alexandra's arrival, the following somewhat sacreligious incident occurred.



The Duchess of Connaught and Queen Amelia

It seems that the day and hour of her arrival were the time fixed for the procession of the Senhor dos Passos. This was doubtless unknown to those who organised the Queen's programme, and, as the landing unfortunately took place as arranged, the procession was postponed.

A few days later, in the next issue of the "Ridiculos", a whole front page picture showed a figure of Christ bowing to one of Britannia and saying "Après vous, Madame". I know this is true because I saw the picture.

There were 2 or 3 minor British Royal visits after that, but I must have been away, so am not sure who came, although I think the son of the aforementioned Duke of Connaught was one. In any case, these visits were private ones.

Some years later, I remember distinctly being introduced to the then Prince of Wales and his brother, the Duke of Kent, at the British Embassy, and being struck by the intense blue of the former's eyes. As I never notice colours, they must have been blue indeed. On this occasion, some of the men guests were asked to go into the drawing-room to have short individual talks with the Prince. He might have been in the business or profession of each one there, so knowledgeable and to the point were his remarks, deserving him fully his epithet of Britain's Commercial Traveller. My husband told me all are impressed with his amazing grasp of things and even with some of his advice.

I know the Duke of Kent opened an exhibition at Belem, which owing to the Second War failed to make its mark, but I cannot recollect whether or not this was the occasion. In any case, whatever duties the two brothers may have had to perform, I know they had a good time as the charming and lively daughters of our Ambassador helped to see to that.

After that visit, the Prince of Wales came again to Portugal on two occasions, once when still Prince of Wales, but incognito, as Mrs. Simpson and friends were with him in the North. Then, some years later, as Duke of Windsor he came with his wife to stay with Portuguese friends in Cascais. They brought little dogs and mountains of luggage, including a sewing machine and cases of whiskey. Friends of mine, who were asked to meet them at lunch at their host's house, were surprised to hear the Duchess saying so much against the British Government in the presence of the Ambassador, Sir Walford Selby.

Now I come to the last but one Royal visit, that of Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh in 1955. Many of you here may remember meeting them at Queluz and, perhaps, speaking with them and hearing the Duke's many amusing remarks. He asked me, for instance, to stand in front of a bust of ugly D. João VI to hide it !

I will dwell mainly on the part that impressed me most, and that was the absolutely wonderful reception given the Queen by the people, especially by the country people. Of course a woman, especially a queen, usually arouses more curiosity and interest than any man. I shall never forget all I saw on the road from Lisbon to Batalha. My husband was one of the men chosen to represent the Colony and to be introduced to the Queen when she laid a wreath on the Unknown Soldier's tomb in the Monastery there, and as, at any rate during the forenoon, the road was blocked to all traffic except that connected with the Queen's tour of Nazaré, Alcobaça and Batalha, those who had to attend were given large permit cards to put on their cars' windscreens.

Although not privileged to enter the monastery, one or two of my family and I went in the car with my husband. What an experience that drive was! There was sun - and rain - at intervals - but, in spite of the rain, every village, every hamlet, and even the most isolated houses and huts, were decorated and the inhabitants stood outside waiting. In many places the roads were carpeted with flowers and arches were set up with an occasional "Welcome" written in big letters. More often than not, a "V" replaced the "W", a comparatively unknown letter here. Whole schools waited patiently, sometimes singing, by the roadside. Everybody appeared to be waving flags or flowers, whilst carpets, bedspreads, or anything big and gay, hung out of windows.

Leslie Blackwell, our Consul then, said to me afterwards: "You know, I positively wept" - and I could too. It was amusing how, as any car came into sight at long and short intervals, short demonstrations would arise from the crowds as it might have been the Queen's! We all got quite good at bowing to acknowledge mistaken cheers!

For the lunch at the Alcobaça Monastery, wonderful improvements had been made inside this historic old building. Walls and flagstones had been covered with valuable hangings and carpets; priceless furniture and silver were brought there and, without in any way detracting from its old style, even 2 dressing-rooms were ingeniously built off the Sala dos Reis.

The Batalha ceremony was short, and we awaited my husband at a pre-arranged spot, as literally thousands surrounded the monastery, and then followed the cortege on its way to Lisbon. It was another triumphant drive. Whilst the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh, along with the Duchess of Palmella and Marcus Cheke who had accompanied them, left the car at Vila Franca to watch folk dancing, peasants decorated this car with country flowers and corn ears, so that it looked like an ambulant harvest festival. Nevertheless, smiling and undeterred, the party got into it and drove thus into town.

The town engagements must have been tiring, indeed, with the constant going backwards and forwards to the Queluz Palace, where the Royal couple stayed, to change into clothes for the various occasions.

In order to make sure that after an Embassy banquet the Queen would arrive in good time at a S. Carlos gala performance, a dinner rehearsal took place to reckon the necessary time - and the wife of a secretary took the Queen's place. It was found necessary to omit a course on the menu in order to shorten the time at table and to allow for a few minutes in which the Queen could powder her nose. In spite of all this counting of minutes, it was well past the hour she was due at S. Carlos when she drove slowly down the Avenida on her way there. The car was brightly lit up, so with the sparkling of her diamond tiara and triple diamond necklace, she was indeed a majestic vision, which the crowds applauded enthusiastically.

On the day of her departure, the British Colony seemed to be at the Airport en bloc to bid her and the Duke of Edinburgh a rousing farewell. They had certainly made themselves very popular by their gracious and happy response to the welcome given them wherever they went.

It is said "Comparisons are odious", but mention of the next British Royal visit to Lisbon, that of Princess Margaret, makes it almost impossible not to compare it with that of her sister, the Queen. Whereas the latter was so willing to appear when acclamation urged her to do so, Princess Margaret seemed to do her best to avoid appearing in public, and I heard many comment adversely on this.

She stayed at the British Embassy, so quite naturally many living in that neighbourhood, both from better classes and from the small humble dwellings that come so close to the big mansions in those streets, hung around the Embassy hoping to get a glimpse of the Princess and often calling aloud for her - all in vain. On one occasion, they were told by a servant that she had the hairdresser there. This seemed to encourage the crowd to wait longer and see the result. However, her usual mode of exit followed, as with a scarf round her head she dashed out of the door and into the waiting car, which drove off before the patient crowd realised what had happened. Although hers was not a state visit, a brief appearance at a window, or at a door, would have appeased those waiting to see her and would have made her more popular.

She definitely did not take after her great-grandfather, Edward VII, in this respect. When he had lunch at this same Embassy, he chose to drink his coffee sitting on a wall seat in the garden, from where he could look down on to the street, and apparently enjoyed acknowledging cheers as much as those cheering enjoyed looking up at a king.

My home was almost opposite to this wall, so on hearing such a clamour, I went out to see what it was all about - and looked up also. The seat, on which he sat then, bears a tablet to this day. I think it is in tiles and it has his name on it.

The Colony met the Princess at an Embassy garden party, and saw her at a Sunday Service at St. George's Church, and at a big military held at the Restelo Stadium, by units of Her Majesty's Forces. Before the Show started, the Princess drove round the big arena in an open car, accompanied by the Ambassador.

A well-known Portuguese family, with an old country house near Tomar, were asked to invite the Princess for a night or two, so that she might see that part of the country. They went to considerable expense to modernise some of the installations, but regretfully felt that she had no interest in the rustic atmosphere and that she was glad to get back to Town and entertainments organized for her there.

I hope my efforts have not bored you unduly. If they have, please blame Mrs. Marques.