

THE BRITISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PORTUGAL

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Quinta Nova
Carcavelos
2777-601 PAREDE

www.bhsportugal.org

SINTRA MEMORIES: Mafalda Possolo

Having spent the greater part of my holidays since childhood in Sintra I would like to record some interesting episodes connected with this lovely place, to quote Byron "this glorious Eden".

Sintra was a favourite place for English families to spend the summer in and I for one remember staying in various *quintas* and houses for several summers until the 1939 war broke out. At this time my parents rented a lovely house in S. Pedro which belonged to my godmother Enid Mitchell. She was a very gifted person, painted, sketched, gardened and did all sorts of artistic work such as lacquer work etc. She was also a masseuse and it was due to this that she decided to go to England at this time to help in that capacity, and so left for England leaving "Alecrim do Norte", her house, to be sold. Being very fond of it my parents decided to buy it and so with various alterations it has now been in the family nearly 70 years.

A few years ago we had an unexpected phone call from the Sintra Câmara asking if we would mind showing our house to two Irishmen, a professor in Dublin University and a friend, who would like to see it. Intrigued, we agreed and sure enough a few days later a Câmara car drove by with these two men. They told us they were doing some research work on Christopher Isherwood and had discovered he had stayed in our house at one time. We were then told how Isherwood and his two friends Stephen Spender and W.H.Auden had rented our cottage from Enid Mitchell and described in a book their stay there: how Enid had found them a cook and it described the house, the garden, and their walks and activities. When my two sisters later visited Dublin they were given a copy of this book.

Quite a number of years later we had a letter from Matthew Spender saying that looking through old family papers he had found an account by his father Stephen Spender, of his stay in our Sintra house and that he was coming out to Portugal and could he visit us. As promised he came and also showed us some papers of his father's describing the house.

He lives in Italy now and is quite a famous sculptor in Tuscany. He left us a very interesting book on his work, so it is nice to think our Sintra house has been a house for so many interesting people.