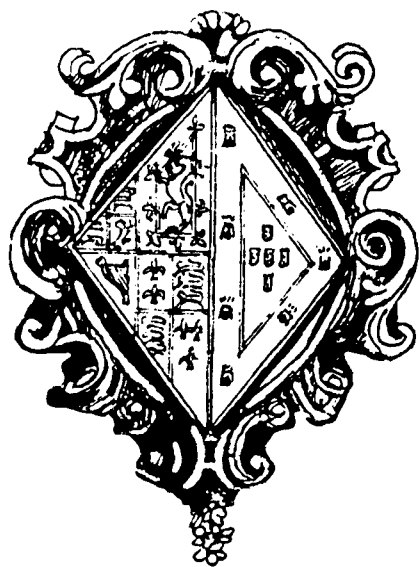


**THE BRITISH  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
OF PORTUGAL**

THIRTY SECOND ANNUAL REPORT  
AND REVIEW 2005

Quinta Nova  
Carcavelos  
2777-601 PAREDE



## The Robinsons

by Laetitia Frazer

George William Robinson was born in 1813. At that time the Robinsons owned a factory in Halifax, Yorkshire, England; called Robinson Brothers Cork Growers. George decided to go and find out more about cork; and so about 1835 (dates vary) he arrived in Lisbon. He stayed there long enough to make business contacts and learn Portuguese; and partly due to the fact that his teacher had relations in Portalegre, he bought a house and rode across the Alentejo to the town which was to become the home of four generations of Robinsons.

Some nine years earlier another English family, the Reynolds, had already started a cork factory in Portalegre, and it was this which George bought or leased. He married Sarah Anne from England and they settled in a house in *Boa Vista* which today is still owned by a distant relation, whose grandfather had married George's daughter Mary.

George and Sarah had six or seven children, the first three or four died very young, and were buried in the garden at *Boa Vista*. John Alvaro died aged 30 in 1892, from typhoid fever; Mary died in 1918 and the last survivor, George Wheelhouse Robinson died in 1932.

G.W. had been sent to England when a very small boy in order to avoid the deceases that his brothers and sisters had died from. After he had completed his education, with distinction in commerce and chemistry, he married Fanny Milner in 1881 and returned to Portalegre, aged 24. His father had bought him a lovely house in what is now called the *Avenida George Robinson*.

This was the golden age of the family and the cork factory. New methods and machinery produced new products for the world markets.

G.W. and Fanny had two sons and two daughters. Their eldest son Milner was married for a short time before going to France in the Army; he contracted the violent Spanish flu germ, and like so many thousands of soldiers, died as a result. Milner's death was a terrible loss to his parents and from which they never seemed to recover. The second son Albert was to spend most of his life running the Factory in Yorkshire, England. Ellen married William Henry Frazer and was the last of the Robinsons connected with the Portalegre factory. William died in 1939 and their eldest son, John, was killed serving the R.A.F. in 1942. As the youngest son, Stephen, was still at school the factory was sold to Portuguese, but still retaining the proud name of Robinson. The youngest daughter did not marry and went to live in England about 1935. Fanny died in 1942.

G.W.'s father was a really tough and able business man, his great concern in life was to do all in his power to help the welfare of his workers. This was shown in many ways; he founded a children's day centre, a co-operative where food could be bought at reasonable prices; was one of the founders of the town and factory fire services, and the local Band, was always ready to take on a businesses and factories threatened with closure, in order to continue to provide employment. He would dig deeply into his pocket for any cause which appealed to his generosity. At the same time over 2000 people depended on their wages to support 4 or 5 family members.

In the late 20's and 30's the great days of Robinsons began to wane. The Spanish properties and factories had to be sold and two disasters occurred which must have cost G.W. millions of pounds at today rates. A large fire caused colossal damage, followed by a demand for years of unpaid taxes – due to an “over-sight” on the part of the English Accountants! At no time did a worker lose a single days pay.

G.W. died suddenly on 16<sup>th</sup> January 1932 and his funeral was a manifestation of real grief and loss, and clearly showed how richly he deserved to be called *o Pai do Povo* (the People's father). His qualities of honesty, compassion and sensibility were known to all who knew him.

--ooOoo--