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**THE STEPHENS BROTHERS
and
MARINHA GRANDE**

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Towards the middle of the 18th century a young man called William Stephens left his native Exeter and came to Lisbon. He joined a firm which was working lime kilns in Alcantara – importing coal from England – and was admitted to the British Factory in 1752. All went well until – as is recorded in the Will of his brother John James – his prospects were, 'nipt in the bud by the fatal catastrophe of 1755 – his Effects and Partner being consumed in the ruins of the dreadful Earthquake that befell this calamitous city of Lisbon on the first of November in that year, he then being established in trade under the auspices of George Midley, Esquire, successor of the ancient and respectable Houses of Francis Burdett Lockwood, and Jonas Hanway.

There appears to be no specific mention of William's firm and its loss in the records still available of the Factory at the time of the Earthquake but it is clear that the British Factory as a whole never recovered from the tragedy of 1755. In his reconstruction of Lisbon and the Portuguese economy the Marquês de Pombal was not disposed to renew the privileges and more-than-favoured trading terms hitherto accorded to the British Factors. He sought to develop industry by the Portuguese and to extend Portugal's overseas trade.¹

But for this he needed the assistance of able men, much as he may have disliked foreign Factories – and let us remember that the British were not the only privileged merchants here – he was prepared to use whatever talents he could find: at the same moment, how and when we do not know, William Stephens came to his notice.

An Irishman called Beare had tried without success to run a small glass factory in Marinha Grande; he had moved there from

Coina, presumably with an eye on the pinewoods as a ready source of fuel. The factory had failed and there was, at that time, no glass being made in Portugal.

The Marquês de Pombal asked William Stephens to go to Marinha Grande, there to re-establish the Portuguese glass industry. What William had been doing after the loss of his lime kilns business we do not know, but he did not, as might have been expected, give his immediate and enthusiastic acceptance. He is said to have taken two years to make up his mind – pleading his lack of experience of the industry and pointing out the improbability of his success where others had failed – and tradition has it that in the end the King D. José, himself, intervened with a personal appeal to William to help his adopted country.

On 7th July 1769 an *Alvará* was granted in the name of William Stephens for the establishment of a glass factory at Marinha Grande. The Treasury gave him an interest free loan of 32 *contos de reis*, and the most important of all concessions, permission was given for the use of wood from the Pinhal for firing the ovens. The *Real Fábrica de Vidros* was founded.

William was joined by his younger brother John James and the two together proceeded to transform Marinha Grande. Of their technical achievements only a technician can properly speak but, within a comparatively short time the Stephens factory was able to provide not only for a national market for glass but for export also; their craftsmen were working with the aid of artists and specialists from England and Italy to produce finely engraved pieces comparable with anything then coming from English or other factories. Portugal is thought to have been the second country (the first being England) to produce crystal. ² Pombal's faith had not been misplaced and when D. Maria I succeeded her father she gave her approval to the renewal, on 11th December, 1780, of the original charter.

But the achievement of the Stephens Brothers was more, much more, than in the technical and industrial fields. As their chief

historian here has said, 'Before the foundation of the Stephens Factory, Marinha Grande has no history. They found a poor village on the edge of the pinewoods; they left a thriving, prosperous and self-respecting community'.

They were not just employers – they were in the real and best sense of the word the 'patrons', the protectors of their workpeople, and their wives and families, the 'squires' of the village. Their social and welfare services provided medical care, sick benefits and a generous pension scheme.

In their school, apprentices learnt their craft and future workers their '3 Rs'. When work was done there was wine to be had in the factory club, for cash not credit, instead of raw spirits in some dingy tavern, and in the theatre next door the workers were themselves performers as well as audience. Nicolau Luis da Silva, a dramatic writer of the 18th century has left on record that he saw a presentation at Marinha Grande of Voltaire's *Olympia*, which he had translated, and that the performance by the factory workers who had never seen theatre elsewhere fell little short of a Court presentation by professionals.³ Since D. Maria I, her son, D. João, and the Court several times visited Marinha Grande one would like to think that she saw what could almost have been a Court performance there.

Following the Stephens' example, other factories came to Marinha Grande, taking practical advantage of their work – for example all could use the *Estrada do Guilherme*, a road built by the Stephens to facilitate the transport of the glass from Marinha Grande to the main highway near to João de Maçãs and it seems likely that the little port of São Martinho owed much of its business to the traffic between and Lisbon. The glass factory was the centre – with, by 1826, no less than 500 employees.

William died 'much lamented', in London in 1802 and John James took over the management, assisted by a cousin, Charles Lyne. John James, saying 'he should not have died', locked his brother's desk in the Lisbon office refusing to touch his papers and asked to be buried with him, 'shewing by this union in death our

intellectual harmony during life'. But perhaps William was *felix opportunitate mortis*.

When Napoleon's armies invaded Portugal, John James found himself imprisoned and his property sequestrated in 1808. They were later restored and he was freed though he was ordered to report to the authorities every 15 days. At the expulsion of the French all the Stephens' privileges were renewed and the Charter extended on 23rd May 1810 for another 20 years – this time including a clause exempting the factory workers from military service.

Thereafter John James could, perhaps with some peace, continue the family work, dividing his time between Marinha Grande and Lisbon.

In 1789 he had been Treasurer of the British Factory Hospital Committee helping to negotiate the purchase of the ground on which the Hospital (now the Parsonage) was to be built and, after the war, we find him again at meetings of Factory, Hospital and Cemetery, waiting on and signing addresses of congratulation to new Envoys, and to the Duke of Wellington, giving grants to charity, discussing the possible evacuation of the British colony and, with his fellow merchants, arranging for the final closure of the British Factory of which he had been a member since 1776.

In May 1825 'being sound in body and mind, but impressed with the grand truth that health is precarious and death certain', John James made his Will. William and he had agreed, and it was so approved and ratified in the 1780 *Alvará* that the factory should be for the 'benefit of this Kingdom and the people or families employed in this undertaking'. Now therefore 'in order to completely fulfil that agreement and to serve as a monument of my esteem and gratitude for the favours and protection afforded me in this country, I do hereby devise and bequeath to the Portuguese nation all the said Premises and Establishment... I firmly hope and wish prosperity, stability and permanency may attend this useful and beautiful Fabric in benefit of Marinha Grande in particular and the advantage of this Kingdom in general, and for ever'.

John James died in 1826 and it is sad to have record that his wishes and hopes, as regards the 'Fabric' were not fulfilled.

In a year of drought and bad harvest, John James had imported at his own cost thousands of bushels of grain to feed not only his workers but all the people of the district. In the years after his death there was no such care and the once proud workers of Marinha Grande were reduced, by mis-management and intrigue, to penury and near starvation. Only in this century, after many vicissitudes and nearly 100 years after John James' death has the factory come to life again.⁴

Today as the traveller enters Marinha Grande from the coast, a sign invites him to visit the *Nacional Fábrica de Vidros*. In the *Praça Stephens* bust of William looks towards the *Teatro Stephens* (now a cinema), alongside the old industrial *Escola Stephens*. Through wrought-iron gates there is the factory, with the *palácio* to the left and a garden behind. Outside the front door is a stone dated 1779 recording that the factory may cut and use wood from the *Pinhal* for the distance of one league. The house, despite its office furnishings, retains its elegance, with William's portrait in the hall, a musician's gallery upstairs and the arms of the Stephens family on a painted ceiling. There is a magnificent kitchen which, it is hoped, will be one day be the centre of a Stephens' Museum.

It is not difficult to imagine the scene when *os opulentos senhores da Marinha Grande* received Her Most Faithful Majesty there.

In the Factory itself, the central workshop gives the impression of having changed but little with the years, as figures dart about with flaming rods and the living glass is plunged into coolers below the floor. In nearby studios artists trace their designs and craftsmen, with what seems to the outsider to be a startling lack of protection for their hands and eyes – although there are very few mishaps – smooth the goblets. In the showroom are some historic pieces and others await the purchaser.

The memory of the Stephens Brothers is very much alive in Marinha Grande. In Lisbon are still to be seen the 'two capital houses' in the *Rua das Flores*, corner of *São Paulo* and *Beco dos Apostolos* forming two sides or a square named *Largo do Stephens* – and very handsome houses they must have been too.

John James 'having the blessing of God' seems to have remembered in his Will all his friends and their families. No-one seems to have been forgotten – and to his old school, Christ's Hospital, he left £3000, 'to Horatia Nelson, the adopted daughter and legacy to the British nation from its most renowned naval commander, one hundred pounds.' When Horatia Nelson was trying to establish her parentage, there was some speculation as to why this glass maker in Lisbon had left her money. As one reads the Will it does not seem odd – the next bequest being to General Lord Beresford, Marquis of Campo Maior, whose eminent services for his country by loss of blood in battle for its defence, his valour and great ability as well in the Cabinet as the field merits great praise and my admiration... five hundred Sovereigns'.

But there is another memory – indeed much more than a memory – of John James Stephens which is alive today.

After all of his remembrance of his friends and benefactors, he left in trust to the British Consul-General some £10,000 for the relief of widows and orphans and, in particular, for the maintenance of Portuguese servants who had 'served in the families of British subjects for upwards of ten years, with unimpeached characters.'

The John James Charity today, regulated by a Chancery Order of 1924 and now officially registered with the British Charity Commission, is still administered by the Consul-General and two co-Trustees. At the end of 1968, from the income of John James bequest, pensions were being paid to 29 people (19 Portuguese, 5 British, 5 dual British/Portuguese). By the rules, money is always kept in hand for emergency medical expenses and so on – and over the years the Consuls-General, no less than the actual beneficiaries, have blessed the name of Stephens.

The Stephens brothers were of good Exeter stock. An uncle, Lewis, was a Doctor of Divinity and Canon of Exeter – he was also a man of means since he endowed some university exhibitions and left his nephew and namesake Lewis, another brother of William and John James, £30,000 which, after John James' death, reverted to the Mayor and Aldermen of Exeter. Their grandfather was vicar of Minheniot. Their father's profession is not known but he may also have been a parson. Both mother and father died when John James was, as he says, 'of tender age' and it is therefore not improbable that, whatever fortune the Reverend uncle Lewis had, William, as oldest of the family, had to start earning his living young.

A third brother Lewis was also in Lisbon. He does not appear to have been a member of the British Factory but he presumably was connected with the family business. He married Mary Bulkeley, of another well-known British family here, and died in 1795. In the British Factory list there is a Jedediah Stephens – admitted 1773 and recorded as having died in 1803. He was presumably another brother but John James makes no reference to him or to his issue. William and John James were unmarried. The Stephens family would merit research in the archives of Exeter no less than here. Let us hope that one day a full history of this remarkable family from both English and Portuguese sources will be written.

In July this year, 200 years will have gone by since that first *Alvará* was granted to William Stephens. This anniversary will not go unmarked in Marinha Grande or in Lisbon.

In the south west corner of the British Cemetery there are two sarcophagi – in one lies Lewis, in the other John James. He did not have his wish to be buried with his dearest brother William, but it is surely fitting that he should rest here, remembered 'with love and affection' by his cousin and successor Charles Lyne, and today honoured by us.

'Always Unostentatious but ever conspicuous
For Honour and Integrity, Benevolence, Hospitality and Affability
And for the most extraordinary Equibility and Placidity of Temper
For these he may be equalled
He cannot be excelled'

I would record my thanks to the Administrator of the *Real Fábrica de Vidros*, Dr José dos Santos Garcia Junior for making available to me the above quote by his predecessor Eng. Acácia de Calazans Duarte and Senhor Alfredo Gândara.

It is hoped that when the Museum is opened, visitors to Marinha Grande will be able to obtain a history of the Factory and the Stephens Brothers, postcards and transparencies – as well as examples of the modern glass worker's craft.

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1. British Factory in Lisbon by A.R. Walford
 2. *Os Stephens no Industria Vidreira na Marinha Grande* the texts 1937 and 1942 respectively by Engenheiro Duarte, at that time Administrator of the Vidros at Marinha Grande
 3. Ibid: Calazans Duarte
 4. See in particular Alfredo Gândara: *Desenvolvimento da industria Lisboa 1967*

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Grace Thornton, OBE, CBE, MVO was British Consul General in Lisbon from April 1965 to early 1970. She took the post of Head of Consular Service in London in April 1970.