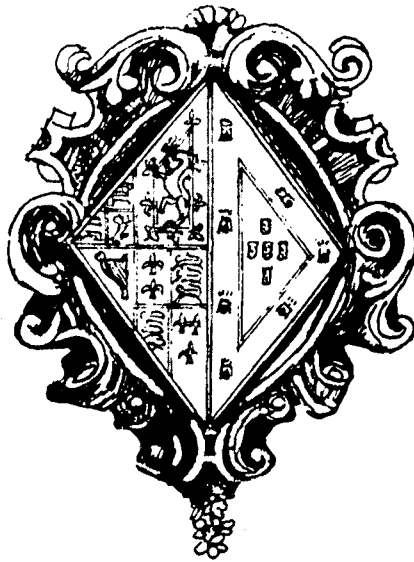


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William Purvis of Sintra

by John R. Purvis, CBE, MEP

The Purvis (sometimes spelt Purves and similar) name is quite familiar in the border counties of Scotland and England where the family seems to have been settled far back into history. The name probably derives from the Old French word *Porveor* meaning to furnish supplies — the modern “purveyor”. In medieval times the *Porveor* was an officer in royal and noble households and in hospitals, convents and monasteries. The border country contained many abbeys such as Lindisfarne, Jedburgh and Melrose. Because of its turbulent and much disputed borderland status, there were many virtually independent warlordships in the area, several of which survive rather more peaceably to this day.

The great-great-grandfather of William Purvis was Alexander Purvis of Etal, in the county of Northumberland just south of the Scottish border. He died in 1694 and is buried in the graveyard of Ford parish church. His son John Purvis, who died around 1750, was tenant of the farm of New Etal in Ford parish. The attractive Georgian farmhouse at New Etal still stands just across the river Till from the model village of Etal and Ford church. Indeed there is no bridge and the river is crossed by way of a ford. John married a Miss Culley, whose family came from further south in County Durham but had moved to Northumberland and were well known as pioneering farmers during this period when the agricultural revolution of the 18th century was taking hold.

They had three sons and the second of these, Joseph, moved to Fife in central east Scotland where the family had regularly sent their sheep for wintering. There he bought a small property called Lochend, 4 kilometres from Dunfermline. Now an industrial and business centre, Dunfermline had been the seat of Scottish Kings and the site of the abbey dedicated to the saintly Queen Margaret. Joseph died unmarried and Lochend reverted to his elder brother Alexander. Meanwhile the youngest son, John, was brought up by an aunt at

New Etal and then lived at Ross, Northumberland, where most of his seven sons were born. He had married (1754) Elizabeth Thompson, the daughter of a neighbouring tenant farmer and, by all accounts, a remarkable woman. Her husband died young, probably around 1770, having lost most of his patrimony through foot rot in his sheep flock. However, she moved with her seven sons to Dunfermline. There she availed herself of the excellent education available at Dunfermline High School and, despite being a widow in straitened circumstances, set all her sons up in successful careers.

The 2nd 3rd 6th and 7th sons all went to South Carolina in the 1780s and 90s, setting up highly successful merchanting businesses. The 4th son (Joseph) was in the East India Naval Services and became Captain of a privateer during the war with France - he was captured by the French and held as a prisoner of war. His son became a merchant in Singapore and was much concerned with its establishment as a free port during the 19th century. The fifth brother (Robert) started out with businesses in Edinburgh and Fife but made his fortune in cotton in the U.S.A. His eldest son joined the British Army and was killed during the Napoleonic wars, probably at La Coruña in Spain. Others of the family set up in the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) as merchants and ship owners and subsequently as plantation owners in the southern United States.

Our concern is with the eldest son Thomas who inherited the property at Lochend and stayed on in Scotland. As well as farming, he made unfortunate forays into the whisky distilling business. This did not prosper due to massive over-production and increases in tax on the product in the early 19th century. However he purchased several properties while things were prospering and married a daughter (Agnes or Ann Hunt) of one of the major landowners in Dunfermline. They had eight children who again dispersed around the world - New Zealand, America, Ireland and Australia. The fourth child and 2nd son was William, who joined the British Army and served (1802-14) during the Peninsular War. When that phase of the war was over he decided to stay on in Lisbon.

William was born 28th July 1791 and was baptised on 4th August in Dunfermline. In what was fast becoming a family tradition, he set up a merchanting and wine business in Lisbon. Presumably from the proceeds of this venture, he was able to purchase a property at *Quinta da Rainha*, near Torres Vedras. He was active in the British Factory in Lisbon, which ran a hospital, church, and school in Lisbon even after its role as a merchant house (similar to that which continued in Oporto) had been suspended. His name appears in the minutes of the Factory in 1822 and 1823 when he was appointed to a committee to report on alterations required to the chapel, hospital and grounds. He was clearly a successful and wealthy businessman and landowner when he married.

Williams's first wife was Clementina Hediviges Barreto, also known as, Helena Hediviges Clementina Borges Alves Cabral who came from the island of São Miguel in the Azores. They had five children. The first two were daughters Eliza and Emilia, who were born in 1819 and 1820 respectively. Eliza was "aged 82 years and enjoying good health" in Portugal in November 1900 when one of her British cousins visited. Sadly we know little else about these two ladies except that one of them married a Mr Crawford.

The third child was a boy: William, born 27th March 1824 and known affectionately throughout the family as "Portuguese Bill". He was sent to Edinburgh, Scotland, for his education, but returned to Portugal to marry Donna Inez de Mello. We know not why, but he apparently deserted his wife, leaving her with children in Portugal, and probably went to South America. So there will probably be descendants of this marriage in Portugal, whom I would dearly like to contact. The fourth child was another daughter, born 17th October 1825 in Chelas, Lisbon and called Helena Hediviges Clementina Purvis after her mother. This was shortened to Jane or Elena when she subsequently went to New South Wales in Australia. She, too, was educated in Scotland, but married (14th August 1845 in Lisbon) Thomas Henry Druitt, the son of a surgeon in Dorset, England, who had been working in William's wine business in Lisbon. They first went to the Azores and then in 1847 to Australia. He was ordained as a priest in the Anglican church and also acted as headmaster of two

prestigious boys' schools in Sydney, New South Wales, rising to the position of Archdeacon. Helena died 7th May 1898 (aged 72 years) in Australia leaving eleven children and a large and still expanding family.

The fifth and last child of William's first marriage to Inez de Mello was Eugenia (or Jane), born 18th September 1831. Educated in Edinburgh, she married Dom José Fernandes Menezes d'Alarcão, who was some years younger than her. They lived at *Quinta da Rainha*, Torres Vedras, her father's property, but she died 21st December 1897 at *Quinta da Rainha* and he continued to live in Lisbon, firstly at *Rua Nova do Carmo*, 32, and, from 1900, at *Rua de Santa Justa*, 79. They had two children, both of whom died before their mother in 1897. The eldest was a son and the younger a daughter Elisa Menezes d'Alarcão. She was living in 1886 as Donna Elisa Pecholts, having married Don Pecholts. We don't know if there were any children but contact with any Pecholts would be interesting and most welcome.

I do not know when Clementina, William's first wife, died, but we know that her last child was born in 1831 and William's next child, by his second marriage, was born in 1867. We can but assume that between these dates, he was left a widower at *Quinta da Rainha*. His daughter Eugenia (or Jane) was probably then living with him. In any event he married a young servant girl on the estate called Maria das Neves. The marriage took place in Torres Vedras and they had seven further children, the eldest being born when he was already 76 years old and the last shortly after he had died aged 89!

William was evidently concerned that he would leave this second family unprovided for and so he bequeathed funds to a charitable institution in Torres Vedras with the express purpose that it bring up and educate these children. This it singularly failed to do, so that the children were starved and reduced to eating grass. The situation was so bad, that the eldest of the children, Eloy Purvis, attacked the director of the institution by jumping on him from a tree. For this offence, he was dispatched to Africa while still a teenager and was killed there while still young and unmarried. The next

brother Luiz became a shoemaker but also died young having no children. Next came two sisters, Amilia and Maria, both of whom probably had no children. The next child, João das Neves Purvis on the other hand, was a tailor in Lisbon, married Eugenia da Silva and had nine children, one of whom is still living — Eduarda da Assunção Silva Purvis. She was born in Lisbon in 1917 and lived in Mozambique until 1976 when she returned to Lisbon. All the living members of this Portuguese branch of the family, with whom I currently have contact, are descended from João. They live in Lisbon, the Algarve, the U.S.A., Oeiras, Alentejo, Paco d'Arcos, Sintra, Barreiro, Sobral de Monte Agraço, Olhalvo, Brussels (Belgium), São Tomé e Príncipe, London (England), Cacem, Costa da Caparica, Fortaleza (Brazil) and Roodepoort (South Africa). The Purvis tradition of never sitting still and spreading worldwide continues unabated with the Portuguese branch. Their occupations are equally various: tailor, office clerk, civil servant, electrician, dressmaker, electronics engineer, head chef, chemical analyst, advertising art director, geography student, real estate agent, secretary, aircraft mechanic, owner of a hardware store, accountant, computer consultant, medical information director, anthropologist, teacher, masseur and gymnasium owner, insurance agent, pharmaceutical economist, education official, mechanic, earth-moving equipment operator, export agent, head of cleaning and security in the British Prime Minister's cabinet office, construction site manager, computer programmer, journalist, quantity surveyor, dentistry trainee, general store owner, shoemaker and restaurant owner. Clearly the Purvis family is contributing actively to the world's economy!

After João, there were two further children: Jesse, who was born in 1874 and died around 1937/4? and lived in Lisbon, and Roberto. Roberto was the child born shortly after his father's death at the aged of 89. He was known as Tio Roberto to all the family and married Serafina. They had one son, Artur, born in 1900 and died around 1977, who married but had no children.

As the family historian I would dearly like to find out what happened to William's first family as I feel sure there must be some

descendants still living in Portugal. On a recent visit to Lisbon I heard tell of d'Alarcãos in the vicinity of Torres Vedras - could they come forward? Does anyone know of a family called Crawford in Portugal or anyone who could be a descendant of William Purvis ("Portuguese Bill") and Inez de Mello? Almost certainly they must have descendants in Portugal.

Recently I had reason to be in Lisbon and so wrote ahead to the Portuguese addresses, which I had. This resulted in 1 1/2 days of constant visits to my hotel by a succession of distant cousins of all ages. We had a delightful time re-establishing contact, which had been all but severed when William settled in Lisbon nearly 200 years ago.

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