

**THE BRITISH
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF PORTUGAL**

TWENTY FIFTH ANNUAL REPORT
AND REVIEW 1998

Quinta Nova
Carcavelos
2777 PAREDE



King Manuel and Queen Augusta Victoria at Fulwell Park, Twickenham

WORKING FOR KING MANUEL AT TWICKENHAM

By Margery Withers

At ten o'clock on the morning of Thursday, 30th June 1932, I went as usual into the library at Fulwell Park, Twickenham, to begin my day's work. As so often happened, King Manuel was already at his desk; but this was a special morning, he had in his hands a copy of volume II of *Early Portuguese Books* (the second part of the illustrated catalogue of His Majesty's collection of XVth century Portuguese books, with his copious bibliographical, biographical and historical notes).

"This is the first bound copy", he said. "The printed wrappers are not ready yet. Would you like to have this copy, or would you prefer to wait for one with a proper wrapper?"

"I would like this one, please Sir" I said. The King inscribed the copy to me, and signed 'Manuel R.'

Now King Manuel was a very good tennis player and, when he was in Twickenham, went once a week to play with the professionals at Queen's Club in London. He was also a regular occupant of the Committee Box at the Wimbledon Championships, which were then in their second week. He knew that I, too, was interested in the tennis, and he gave me the next day off so that I could go and watch the play. My mother and I got seats at the back of the centre court, and, by chance, directly behind the Committee Box. I saw the King arrive, and late afternoon I saw him get up to leave. He bowed and smiled to the friends surrounding him, and disappeared down the stairs. The next day came his tragic and agonising death – of oedema of the throat. So the sad importance of my copy of volume II of *Early Portuguese Books* is that it carries one of the last signatures of 'Manuel R'.

I had been His Majesty's librarian since 1924, when at the age of eighteen I had come back from a year of studying French in Switzerland. King Manuel's books were then valued at some £32,000 and he was still adding to his collection through the antique book sellers Maggs Brothers of London. I had been at school, both in England and Switzerland, with the eldest daughter of Mr Ernest Maggs; so when His Majesty spoke of a plan to publish a catalogue of his books, and of his wish to engage a librarian, Mr Maggs suggested that he might consider employing me. I could speak Spanish (learnt in Patagonia, where I was born) and therefore would be able to read Portuguese reasonably well. Thus, one Sunday afternoon, Mr Maggs and Dr. Maurice Ettinghausen (who was King Manuel's main contact at Maggs Brothers) escorted me to Fulwell Park to be presented to its royal owner. Happily for me I was accepted and it was arranged that I should spend a fortnight or so at Maggs Brothers in Conduit Street learning how to catalogue early books, after which I could begin working at Fulwell Park.

My starting salary was £3 a week, and I was in the library from 10 o'clock in the morning until 4 o'clock in the afternoon each day from Monday to Friday. When *Early Portuguese Books* was actually going to press, there were times when, to meet a deadline, I might have to stay at Fulwell Park for two or three days, so that I could work late into the evening.

The books in the library were rather casually arranged, and my first job was to sort them into a clearer order. When I had accomplished this task to the King's satisfaction, he explained his plan to make a catalogue of his XVIth century collection, with notes on every aspect of each book. The reason for this undertaking was movingly set out in His Majesty's Introduction to volume I:

'In trying to give life to these early Portuguese books... we seek to bring into relief the achievements of the Portuguese, especially in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries...The purpose of our work is to show the greatness of the Portuguese exploits, and to serve our nation by raising "the banner of her triumphs". It is unpretentious, says nothing

new and does not presume to teach anyone, but we hope that it will prove our love for our country; if we achieve that ambition, we shall have the supreme consolation of a duty done.'

My share in this work was to make detailed bibliographical collations, and, by consulting the three great Portuguese authorities – Anselmo (*Bibliografia das Obras impressas em Portugal no Seculo XVI*), Innocencio (*Diccionaria Bibliografico Portuguez*) and Barbosa (*Bibliotheca Lusitana*) – to provide notes on the number, whereabouts and condition of the other known copies of each book as I described it. I would also try to find any other reference books the King might want to consult and have them ready for use when they were needed. At first, of course, I knew nothing about Portugal and its history and literature, but I learned a good deal as I went along. Anyway, the King seemed to find my notes useful and would sometimes send instructions like those which came from Sigmaringen in his letter of 14th September 1931:

'When you return to work at Fulwell I ask you to carefully examine the notes for the next books. As soon as I return we shall have to work hard to finish Vol.II as soon as possible, and we have to economise on time. I beg you then to revise your notes to see if there is anything useful to be added: it will save me much trouble.'

In the early stages the King ignored chronology. The first article he wrote was on the *Cronica do Clarimundo* (1553), and the second was on his illuminated manuscript *De Bello Septensi*, which did in fact start Volume I. But he quickly realised the need to be more methodical. Thus, in his letter of 11th November, 1927 from Sigmaringen, he wrote:

'There are several Portuguese manuscripts which are ready; unfortunately I think the very great majority are late works, that is after 1545.'

But only a few days later (17th November) he was to say:

‘We have to proceed chronologically, if not we shall be lost.’

The King had planned that his book should have an English text alongside the Portuguese, and at a fairly early stage in the proceeding he asked me to prepare some rough translations for him to work on. I, of course, did the very best I could (with the help of the Michaelis *Diccionaria da Lingua Portuguesa e Ingleza*); His Majesty decided that my versions would be acceptable and I greatly enjoyed working on them.

On Sundays Their Majesties often lunched at Buckingham Palace with King George and Queen Mary. One Monday King Manuel told me that he had spoken to King George about my translations. King George had said: “That’s all very well, Manuel, but how the devil did she learn Portuguese?” His reply had been : “I don’t know George, but she did.”

On November 11th, 1927, when King Manuel wrote his first letter to me, arrangements were being made for the start of printing volume I of *Early Portuguese Books*, and soon after that we were involved in proof-reading. This was a task which the King would carry out even away from his library; so when he was on the Continent for holidays or family reasons, or on his annual cure at Vichy, I had to send him the proofs as they arrived from the printers. When he returned the proofs with his corrections the King always included a personal letter to me. I still have these letters, a Portuguese translation of which was published in 1997 by the *Fundação da Casa de Bragança*. They show how dedicated he was to his work on the book, how involved in every detail of its publication, and how eagerly he looked forward to being back at his desk.

That desk was not really very convenient for the writer. On it was a rather large and handsome inkstand, some family photographs, and always two or more tall vases of flowers arranged for him by the Queen; so the available space was barely enough to accommodate the sheets of foolscap paper on which he wrote. Any books I had

collected for him to consult had to be piled on the floor to the left of his chair. I should add that my researches rarely produced all the available material; the King, with his wonderful Bragança memory, would recall other works I must bring him.



Miss Margery Withers in 1980

His Majesty worked steadily through the morning, he at his desk and I at mine, which was set in the same big window of the library. The only interruption would come from Queen Augusta Victoria, bringing a fresh vase of flowers for the royal desk. The Queen was very interested in the garden, and the flowers she arranged were of her own growing – unless they happened to be cypripediums or cymbidium from the King's well-stocked orchid house.

At one o'clock we broke for a family lunch, at which the King's private secretary, Francisco Quintela de Sampayos and his wife, Maria, would also be present. After lunch the Sampayos would usually return to their own quarters, and the King and Queen would sit for a while in the long gallery, where I was invited to join them for coffee, made each day by the Queen. I would probably go for a short walk in the Park before resuming my duties, and sometimes I might pass Their Majesties busily raking leaves in a rough part of the Park near the River Crane, which was a feature of the property. "This is so good for the line!" the King would say.

When at around 4 o'clock I left to go home, the King was usually still hard at work and I know that sometimes he scarcely left his desk until the early hours of the morning. Every word of his articles in Volumes I and II of *Early Portuguese Books* was written in the King's own hand; my translations were also hand-written by me. The manuscripts were then sent for typing to Maggs Brothers in Conduit Street. At that time I had not learnt to use a typewriter, and in any case would not have been able to use one in the library, as it would have been disturbing to the King.

It is a sign of King Manuel's great generosity that, when the title page for his work was first discussed, he wanted my name to be included. It had to be pointed out to him that, people being as they are, the general conclusion would be that it was I who was responsible for the whole thing – which could not have been wider off the mark. All I did was make a detailed bibliographical description of each book, and translate the King's full and learned commentaries into English.

Early in 1930 it was becoming obvious that if text and illustrations were to remain on the same scale as in volume I, the two scheduled volumes would not have nearly enough space to accommodate them. Indeed, in his letter of 20th March, 1930, the King wrote from Cannes:

'We two shall have to make a kind of programme to see if we can really reduce the size of the two volumes of the book without altering the fundamental lines [I] have established for my work... I think the first point is to reduce the text to bibliographical notes only for the books which have no real interest and those which are written in Spanish by Spanish authors. 2. To write a short introduction to explain the difference between vol.I and vol.II. 3. To see if it is possible (and I think it is) to have more than one illustration in one page, saving space, which is precious. I think that with small books – and there are many – one can do it. By the letter I received from the Doctor (which I enclose)... you will see that Messrs. Maggs are rather worried by the probable size of the next two volumes of my book!'

King Manuel was particularly interested in the problem of the expulsion of the Jews from Portugal. He felt that many historians had misread Manuel I's policy in the matter. Thus he spent many weeks researching and writing his article on Samuel Usque's *Consolação as Tribulações de Israel*. As he wrote to Edgar Prestage on 17th January 1931:

'I had to bring forward many testimonies and certain facts which had been carefully ignored by those writers.'

It was not, perhaps, surprising that the publishers felt bound to point out that the resulting article was too long for the available space. So when the typescript came back from Maggs Brothers, the King handed it to me and asked me to suggest any cuts I thought possible. I knew he found it difficult to accept deletions, and indeed

later that year he made his feelings very plain in a letter he wrote to me from his mother's chateau in Versailles:

'Your devastating discovery that three articles will end on the wrong page was, I must confess, a hard blow! I have been carefully examining the proofs you sent me of those unhappy articles and the cuts you suggested. As you know I hate making cuts to my humble prose once it has been printed; it is one more weakness to be added to the many others I have! I like changing and trying to improve (if I can!) what I write; but I hate cutting bits here and there to save a page! In the case of the *Cerco de Diu* it was possible, so as you shall see I removed – reluctantly – 19 lines. As you say that about 20 lines will be sufficient I hope that these 19 lines will be enough; because I will not delete a single more line!.. To cut 26 lines – more than half a page in the *Albuquerque* would, in my opinion, spoil the article where every word has a meaning: therefore it has to remain as it is. Regarding the *Constituições de Evora* it would be necessary to save 43 lines – a whole page! – cutting a bit here, a bit there. Apart that this operation would be a delicate amputation performed on several Bishops, it would be a perfect "casse-tête chinois" for me and, as I am rather egoistic, I prefer to save my head and lose two or three pages.'

So to suggest cuts was a daunting task; but I had to obey orders, and I managed finally to pencil in a series of suggestions which, in some trepidation, I showed to His Majesty. At first it was almost impossible to persuade him to remove even a few lines; but I was sometimes able to point out that he had said the same thing, perhaps better, further on in a slightly different context. Eventually he became more or less reconciled to the process and once, after crossing through four or five consecutive pages, he turned to me with a twinkle in his eye and said: "You know, Miss Withers, this is one of the best cuts we have done yet!"

It was good that King Manuel was able to see the second volume of his work complete and printed before his tragic death; but that he did not live to complete the task he had set himself is a loss to us all. So much that was stored in his mind will never now be known. His study, for instance, of his magnificent collection of the works of Camões would have been of outstanding interest; but he had, in fact, scarcely even begun to think about the contents of his volume III. He left no preparatory notes. The last few months of work on volume II had been an effort that left him exhausted and he was planning to take a long and much needed holiday before setting his mind to the last part of his publication.

As her letters show, the bereaved Queen was deeply affected by the death of her beloved husband. She had a house built at Umkirch in Germany whose rooms were to reproduce as closely as possible those in which she had lived at Fulwell Park. As a last tribute to King Manuel she wanted to ensure that at least the extent of his collection of XVIth century books should be made known and that the purely bibliographical part of his catalogue should be completed. Since this section of the work had been my responsibility throughout she arranged for me to go on with it, and for Fulwell Park to remain in occupation for as long as I was working on the books there. Her letters and her friendship were a great support to me as I proceeded with my task.

In the years since his death I have begun to understand how deeply unhappy the King was about developments in Portugal; but little of this was apparent to me while I was in his employ. I remember his saying how impressed he was with Dr. Salazar, whom he expected to be a stable influence. But normally we were so concentrated on the job in hand that I thought of nothing else. Sometimes during the labour of getting volume II of *Early Portuguese Books* through the press he might say how tired he was, or he might complain of a heavy cold; but he allowed nothing to come between him and the great task he had set himself.

Fulwell Park was sold in 1934 and I had to watch the books which had become my friends being consigned to packing cases for

eventual dispatch to Portugal, where the King wished them to be housed in his favourite Palace of Vila Viçosa. The house had been pulled down and the area which used to be the property of King Manuel is now occupied by rows of suburban houses. The Royal connection has not been entirely forgotten though; the streets of new buildings have been named Fulwell Park Avenue, Manoel Road, August Road, Portugal Gardens and Lisbon Avenue. I went there in June 1996 and walked again beside the River Crane, as I used to do when I was working in King Manuel's library. Nettles and blackberries were rampant on each side of the narrow path and trees were taller and more numerous than I remembered. Instead of the long pale building I knew, with its green lawn sloping down to the river, instead of the Queen's flower beds, all I could see were the backs of neat houses and the fence which bounded the ends of their small rectangular gardens.

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Margery Withers was King Manuel's librarian for eight years. A period which has left her with nostalgic memories and many letters in the handwriting of Portugal's last monarch, who was then in exile in England. Miss Withers is now aged 93 and lives in London.